THE SQUIRE OF ASH

FRANK DILNOT

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THE SQUIRE OF ASH

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By FRANK DILNOT

Author of "Neame of Kent."

A ROMANCE of love and adventure in the year 1688.

Henry Godwyn, the young Squire of Ash, is plunged by love and duty into a welter of intrigue and fighting with the world in arms against him. Edith Hardres, the beautiful young daughter of the Squire's enemy, is the centre of a charming love story in which a part is played by many famous people, Mr. Pepys, the King, Lord Devonshire, Lord Dover, and the Countess of Dorsetshire—full of wiles and wit and cunning. There are pictures of the highwaymen of the time, of tavern life, of doings in the Palace and Whitehall. The story holds one as much by its characterization as by its sweeping movement—a thrilling narrative touched with comedy, culminating in high drama.

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THE SQUIRE OF ASH

BY

FRANK DILNOT

(Author of "Neame of Kent")

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BROOK HOUSE

"Brook House, the home of the Godwyn family, lyeth two miles to the west of Sandwich, and has to the north-east Richborough, where the Romans were, and on the other side the village of Ash, whose church tower can be seen as far as Wingham. Its avenue of oaks was planted in the reign of the seventh Henry, and some of the edifice is from before that monarch, and in the cellars are round archways of masonry, past fabric of a mansion which, so 'tis said, was the abode of the great Earl Godwine who ruled much of England before the Normans came, and was so well-beloved in Kent. And 'tis worth recall that every fourth or fifth Godwyn till this day hath died of apoplexy, and the great earl was laid low by apoplexy at the King's table, though some have lyingly said he was choked by a piece of meat for an oath he took.

"Brook House is to be seen as a tangle of spiralled chimneys, and of gables and mullions, and runneth hither and thither like a maid uncertain of her ways, and all around its walls grow red and white roses in summertime up to the eaves, and on the north side are canopies of ivy. To the south and west of the house a garden with flowers in it wanders amid mulberry trees of which no man knows the age, and on the east the two wings, right-angled, give space for a cobbled yard beyond which are the stables and many farm buildings, and a line of ricks at the further end. From the house on stormy nights can be heard the waters rolling off the Goodwin sands, which had their name from the great earl who possessed much land hereabouts.

" Within the walls of Brook House Godwyns have been bred unbrokenly back to—who can say? —and they have been squires of late generations, but before that were knights and nobles, some of them with high reputations, such as he who went to France with the Black Prince, and that other who fell with the banner of Lancaster in his hand at Bosworth Field. In the hall is the coat-of-mail of a captain, a very hardy fellow who sailed with Drake and fell upon mischance on the Spanish Main, and was hanged as a pirate by the Spaniards: Stephen Godwyn was his name.

" A hundred stories lie buried in the worn stone steps, the ancient beams, the oaken stairway, the blackened floor, stout still in spite of worm-holes. Brook House preserves some secrets, and none would wish to know them all, for in the long line of Godwyns have been cruel men and crafty men as well as others very noble, and some who stood high in counsel. An imperious breed they have always been, whether rich or poor, but all were men of Kent and in this they shone that not one of them lacked courage. The grass grows as aforetime, the oaks burgeon every spring without cessation, and so it has been ever that the Godwyns born at Brook House have had some common fibre—ill men to be over-pressed, too ready with blow in place of word, and yet to balance—for none are so hard as they appear—with rough indulgence for their underfolk who serve them well.

" On the lintel at Brook House, part obscured by drooping ivy, is graven a man with a spear and beneath in characters very old ' Godwyns makyth their own fate.' "

FROM AN OLD KENTISH RECORD.

THE SQUIRE OF ASH

CHAPTER ONE

THE QUARREL AT THE SESSIONS

THE sessions of the peace at Wingham drew fourteen justices to the court-house from the country round, and they would have come had there been but a single breach of the ordinances, for sessions was a parliament in little, besides being a gathering where squires might meet their betters.

Sir James Oxenden, lately Member for Sandwich at Westminster, stood by his big chair talking about the troublesome question of a change in labourers' wages with Sir Edward Hales who had come over from Canterbury, while lords of the manor and lesser gentlemen, in long coats and wigs usually kept for Sunday wear, entered by twos and threes and found places in the line of seats to right and left.

"I see both Hardres and Godwyn are here," said Hales in an undertone.

"Thank Heaven they sit apart."

"Which is the powder and which the spark this morning?"

"Hardres has his gold-headed cane with him, a bad sign."

"'Tis said that country life engenders peace and charity!"

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"Cocks fight in the barnyard every day. Hardres and Godwyn being neighbours have hated each other these thirty years and no one to tell the reason. Here's the wardman and the town clerk. Ye'll take the seat next me, Sir Edward; 'tis kept for you."

The court resounded with the sonorous "Oyez, oyez, oyez" from the wardman, and then with the old-time formula, and after that the town clerk placed the parchment-covered record book before Sir James, who turned a leaf or two to scan the list of delinquents.

"The first case is that of Henry Beadle, who did suffer four hogs to run untended through the ways of Wingham the whole of one Saturday afternoon and evening. Bring in Henry Beadle."

"Sir James Oxenden, I beg leave to make a protest before the duties of this day do begin."

Sir Valentine Hardres was on his feet, gold cane in hand, a falcon-faced man, with heavy grey brows, and a precise voice that took something from his age. Shuffling of chairs and whisperings stopped; the justices were all eyes and ears, for the sharp-tongued baronet from Woodnesborough was respected among them, if a little feared. Squire Godwyn of Ash, heavy-jowled, lifted his head to look across at his neighbour loweringly; no fear in him.

"What is your wish, Sir Valentine?" said Oxenden, keeping his finger on the charge.

"We are sworn to administer the laws. I see here Sir Edward Hales against whom I have no personal disregard but is known to all as a Papist."

There was an intaking of breaths, a mumbled word from Squire Driver, an open growl from Squire Godwyn.

"Sir Edward Hales has long been on the commission of peace for the county of Kent, Sir Valentine."

"He is debarred as all should well know. What says the Test Act? Every person taking office shall declare against Catholic practices and receive communion of the Church of England."

"This is no task for me, Sir Valentine."

"One for me, though," boomed Squire Godwyn, who rose up as he spoke, a great-shouldered man with square face.

"Are we here to see mud flung at Sir Edward Hales? Catholic is he? Well, what's that? Is he not a good Kentish gentleman like his father before him? Who's got a better right at sessions than he has? Not Sir Valentine Hardres, and I tell him to his face. We're not back to Cromwell for whom he fought with hair cut short——"

"I beg Squire Godwyn to say no more," interrupted Oxenden. "We most of us feel as he does about Sir Edward Hales."

"Is that your answer?" demanded Hardres. "I call all to witness that Sir Edward Hales is breaking the law in sitting here as a justice. The tread of Rome is everywhere among us. He has courage to come here."

Some of the justices were uneasy in their chairs, and Oxenden leaned over for a whispered word with Hales. Squire Godwyn pushed aside his friend, Boteler, from Eastry, who was trying to restrain him.

"Who's Sir Valentine Hardres to throw a man's religion in his teeth? Sir Edward a Catholic—well, let him be. Is there a better landlord in the county? Is there a friend he does not help? If this is being a Catholic——"

"I speak of the law," said Hardres. "The obligations of Squire Godwyn to Sir Edward Hales——"

"Ye lie and ye know it," thundered Godwyn. "I'll tell ye——"

He stopped, for Sir Edward Hales had risen, very dignified and complacent, and the only one among them who wore a sword.

"Sir Valentine Hardres is within his right in bringing forward this contention, and if you will permit me, gentlemen, I can satisfy him and also any others who may have doubts. You have all sworn allegiance to the King?"

"To administer the laws," said Hardres.

"Sworn allegiance to the King," repeated Hales; "'tis important. A week past in the Court of King's Bench, the Lord Chief Justice decided that the King's prerogative enabled me to hold any office. The King has dispensing power. I am glad that among other considerable results this judgment permits me to retain my place on the commission of the peace for Kent."

"The King's dispensing power above the law!"

"You've learned your place, Sir Valentine Hardres," shouted Godwyn.

"I ask my friends, Squire Godwyn and Sir Valentine Hardres, to be patient," said Oxenden. "The position has been stated by Sir Edward who has removed any disquiet if such did exist among us following what we heard from Sir Valentine Hardres, who, we may be sure, was but moved by conscience in this business."

"Aye, aye," went along the line. Godwyn, rumbling anger still, and Hardres, more than half defiant, were pulled down to their places by friends on either side.

"Bring in Henry Beadle, wardman," said Oxenden.

Two hours later, in the road outside, horses were assembled for those of the justices who purposed to ride

away home without going for dinner to the Chequers—always the concluding ritual on sessions day. A stable boy was there with two mounts pawing round in circles regardless of ejaculated commands and sundry slaps with the leading rein. Sir Edward Hales's groom was ready mounted with his hand on the bridle of his master's mare. A dozen yards along the road the seventeen-years-old daughter of Sir Valentine Hardres was patting the neck of a noble chestnut, Buccaneer, the pride of Woodnesborough; a dapple pony rubbing her shoulder the while: and nearly opposite the court-house door Harry Godwyn stood with his father's roan, and a leggy, mouse-coloured steed, more accustomed to the shafts of a tip-cart at Brook House than to a saddle.

Harry Godwyn took a look at laughing, sparkling seventeen when she was not turned in his direction, recalled how she had ridden by him a minute or so before with gaze fixed ahead as unaware of him as of the stable lad—true Hardres. He was not to know that as the justices began to show themselves in the doorway and he was busy backing his horses, the girl peeped beneath the arched neck of Buccaneer for a glance at him.

The justices came forth and stood around in talk, and Sir Edward Hales and Sir James Oxenden and Squire Godwyn were in a group when the baronet from Woodnesborough stepped from the entrance by himself. He was at his haughtiest; two hours of repression had not improved a temper made sore by a defeat, a defeat not the less humbling that Squire Godwyn would chuckle over it for months. Hardly a word had left Sir Valentine's lips while judgment was duly made on those who had sold bread short of weight, who had brawled on a Sunday evening, or had uttered an oath in the

hearing of villagers on the way to church. He walked out from the court-house fully charged.

"You should join the Church of Rome, Squire Godwyn; 'twould be more honest."

"Ods whims! Sir Valentine Hardres! Would you be offensive?"

"You'll have scant company in Kent. Mayhap Sir Edward Hales will prove friend enough. Your manners may be improved——"

"Death, Harry, d'ye hear that?"

Godwyn looked round at his son who had come up by his side.

"We'll away home, father," said Harry Godwyn, with his hand on the older man's sleeve. The squire flung him off.

"Let be. I'll teach him."

"This should go no further," said Sir Edward Hales. "Squire Godwyn, you're in the right of it. I pray you mount your horse for home."

"Aye, squire; I'll ride with you," said Oxenden.

Squire Godwyn heard neither of them; his face was purple as he pushed a step towards Sir Valentine.

"You, and your peacock's feathers. You're rebel now against your King, as you were in old Noll's time. You'd lord it, would you, you grandson of a scullion. Manners! I'll give you manners."

"Not until you forgo the wine bottle before breakfast, Squire Godwyn."

"So!"

The squire lurched forward, his great fist bunched, and Edith Hardres, quicker than the others around, sprang in front of her father with hands outstretched, and was like to be crushed like an eggshell when Harry Godwyn made an onrush against the squire from behind and

threw him from his course. He seized the wisp of a girl and swung round sideways with her in his arms. Hales had a hold on the waist of the struggling squire.

"Put down my daughter!"

Harry, his eyes on his father, hardly heard the words and then came a stinging flat hand blow on his cheek and Edith Hardres slid from him.

Never a man more surprised than Harry Godwyn; he stood bewildered as much as angry and as he strove to contain himself against the insult he perceived that the effect on others was as deep as on himself. Hales was making a step to Sir Valentine, and stopped as the squire gave a curious whining cry.

"Calm yourself, Godwyn; this shall be requited."

The squire's knees were shaking, his eyes had lost their fury and his voice might have been that of a child in distress.

"He struck my boy," he said; "he struck my boy." Then slowly his legs gave way beneath him, and he sank down into the roadway, an ungainly heap.

Harry Godwyn leaped forward and, kneeling in the mud, raised the squire's head.

"What's amiss, father?"

The squire said nothing; his face, already suffused, had taken a darker hue, his breath came noisily.

"Fetch a surgeon," cried the young man, and half a dozen from the crowd set off at a run to the village.

While friendly hands helped Harry Godwyn carry his father into the court-house, Hales walked over to Sir Valentine.

"Sir Valentine Hardres, you will be held to account for this."

"You presume, Sir Edward Hales. Your friends should be more careful of their drink and diet."

CHAPTER TWO

THE BLACKBERRYERS

ONE day of blue and gold in late September, Edith Hardres with crook and basket was gathering blackberries on a bushy knoll at Richborough, and Harry Godwyn, espying her from below, became glad he had chosen that morning to look at the turnip crop in the shadow of the old Roman ruins. He stepped behind a clump of hazel to watch her—a comet from afar unexpectedly brought near to the earth for inspection.

The cares of inheritance had lain heavy on the young squire for the best part of a year, and the edge of tragedy had before long been dulled by the struggle with loans, dues, liens, mortgages and quit-rents, and another kind of legacy, a worry old but ever new about his younger brother; he had small space for lighter fancies. Yet was he shot in many hours by thoughts about the elfish daughter of his father's enemy—this laughing maid who lived within two miles, and who, at eighteen years of age, was so mischievous a whimsy—a piece of colour to the drab hard-working countryside. Young men of higher rank than Harry Godwyn—spread from Deal to Ramsgate—found her a tantalising creature,—with demureness on demand.

She teased the prim Sir Valentine, so it was rumoured; and in early days had scandalised Barton, the steward at Woodnesborough, by trying to milk the cows. This last year she had been growing up very

joyfully. She was firm about the price of butter with Sparrow, the Canterbury carrier; and she had insisted on her father paying rent for the cottage of disreputable Dame Wheddle with two grandchildren. Not all sweetness either. A day of heavy rain did not prevent her from walking to Sandwich to give Elwood, the harness-maker, his due about the defective webbing in the new girth for her pony.

"A daring creature for a lady born," declared Lady Oxenden, whereupon her son, Christopher Oxenden, who had read Mr. Dryden and Sir Charles Sedley, was indignant. "She's like a bluebell laughing in the wind," he cried.

"More like a stinging nettle," replied her ladyship.

Harry Godwyn's father had lingered on, a dying man, for three months after his seizure, and no word of sympathy or regret had come from Woodnesborough Hall either then or on that bleak December day when they laid him to rest in Ash churchyard. A hard man was Sir Valentine, the harder it would appear after the encounter in which he had been so much to blame.

In the old days he had permitted himself a nod to Harry's father, but there was nothing of the kind for the younger man, neither word nor salutation when they met as they were bound to do sometimes in the market square in Sandwich or on the road between Ash and Woodnesborough. He had, moreover, a dutiful daughter who turned her head away carelessly.

Edith Hardres was a busy person among the brambles at Richborough, proceeding with the slow intentness which is the characteristic of the determined and successful blackberryer. White sun-bonnet hid most of her face, but a straight brown nose was visible, and Harry Godwyn witnessed the concentration and anxiety as she

stretched forward with her crook for swaying growths, so many of them just beyond her reach, and all so richly laden. She scratched her finger, and gave an "Oh!" which came clearly down to him, and he saw her pull out the thorn and suck the place with a frowning smile.

Perhaps it was the sunshine, the lisping breeze, the surprise of coming upon her that worked upon Harry Godwyn, and drove him to the boldest action of his life. His resolve could not have come to him by any deliberation; it was the sudden flash which makes a man braver than he really is in either love or war.

He stepped through a hedge into the open field where he could be seen, and shouted to the blackberryer, "You can get bigger ones lower down."

The sun-bonnet lifted, the holland dress straightened itself: she had to stand upright to see who hailed her, and the squire had time for a quake, and to prepare himself for her condemning silence, the while he pointed with his hand to the untouched bushes fifty feet below her.

"I don't believe I can get down there," she called out.

"If you go back a little there's a path down by the left."

He began to march through the strip of turnips and shouted again:

"No, directly behind you. Wait a minute, I'm coming up."

When he reached her, with a deep breath or two from his speedy climb, and a doubt as to what he could say and how she would receive him, all difficulty magically went away.

"I was coming to help you with the crook," she said. "You were too quick for me."

"I used to scramble up here when I was a boy. Any luck this morning?"

"See." She tilted towards him her basket more than half-full with the berries and she twinkled with laughter at her success. "Less than an hour."

"I'll show you where the really big ones are."

He took her through alleyways of thistles and alders, round the foot of a mis-shapen mound, and then to a ridge of brambles which faced due south and from which hung clusters of the ripened fruit.

"O—oh!" she exclaimed.

"What did I tell you?"

"You're a good blackberryer."

"I began my training early," laughed Harry Godwyn.

He set to work to help her among the berries and very soon his hands, like hers, were purple with the juice. He would press deep in the thicket and, with the crook, pull forward luscious bunches for her to pick. Once she kept him on the stretch while she slipped a tempting one in her mouth.

"You like blackberries?"

"Better than plums and pears. Isn't it disgraceful?"

"I make half a meal of them when I'm working in the fields this time of year."

She looked up at him.

"I think we'll have a few," she said.

Thus it was that they sat on a turfy bank with the basket between them, and ate blackberries and talked about the things they liked to eat and drink, the patterns of the shadows in the meadows spread beneath them, the gathering of the swallows for their journey overseas, the sadness of the stubble with the corn

removed and winter on its way. They agreed that autumn had a song of its own. "There is the chorus," said Harry, as partridges hidden in the turnip field began their cheeping call.

"I like spring better but there are good days in September; this is one. I could sit here ever so long, and let father get anxious over me at dinner-time."

"I am more poetic; this morning I feel I am going to live a million years."

"Don't disturb the ghosts in these old Roman battlements; they'll think you're one of them. I wonder if the Roman soldiers ate blackberries here?"

"I dare say they knew the good things of life," said Harry.

He picked a way down the slope with her and then they went together along a cart track, under which lay the Watling Street of 1,400 years before, and talked of wayside trifles. He pointed out to her a new hop-garden he was planting, and she had to climb up on to a five-barred gate the better to observe it. Before they reached the short cut across the fields which led to Woodnesborough he said, "I remember you as a little girl," and she replied, "I never thought you very old." They laughed together.

It was by accident they broke upon the subject which from the start was in the minds of both of them.

"There'll be a lot more blackberries to pick," she said.

"I'll be watching for the trespasser."

"Trespasser!" she exclaimed.

"They are on my land."

She was all dismay.

"Your land! I thought it was part of ours. I didn't know. Whatever will father say?"

" I can keep a secret," said Harry.

She looked at him, and he kept his eyes out across the fields, knowing something of her thoughts.

" Mr. Godwyn, I would like to say how sorry I am for all that happened at Sandwich—about your father, I mean."

" Let it rest. You did not know my father."

She paused, determination mounting.

" Can you tell me why there has been this everlasting quarrel? You know I lived with my aunt in Yorkshire, after my mother's death. I only came back here three years ago. My father is so sensible and so generous about everything else. He has a temper, of course."

" Mistress Hardres, I have an explanation—just two cantankerous old men."

" Father can't bear sight or sound of you only because you are a Godwyn. Was the quarrel on account of taking different sides in Cromwell's time, all those years ago? "

" An excuse, no more—though my father used to rave on it. His real reason was that we were poor with our two hundred acres, and you were rich though you had but fifty acres of a home-farm here. He knew of your mother's property in Yorkshire. The Godwyns used to live in state. They have been displaced. Extravagance, carelessness—land and money won't last for ever. My father was as lax as those before him. It was a continual offence to him that you should have a groom, a gardener, two indoor servants. We had Deborah and Tomlyn, and did the garden ourselves."

He pulled himself up.

" There's the tale. You make me forget 'tis the first time we have met, Mistress Hardres."

"You do me courtesy, Mr. Godwyn. I beg you will continue."

"Not much more to say. I'm working to build up some prosperity again. New methods, new accounts, root crops, grass turned to plough once more, proper rotations. Old stock turned out for fresh. A hundred alterations. Behold the industrious apprentice."

"They say your pigs are the best that go to Sandwich market now."

"They're good. So are my Scotch cattle. You must come and see them some day."

"I wish my father could hear you talk. You've been to London, Mr. Godwyn?"

"I returned to Ash before you came back to Woodnesborough. I was at Cambridge University, went from there to learn to be a lawyer with my father's old friend, Mr. Cornwallis, at the Temple in London. My mother's illness brought me home."

"I have such a great deal to talk to you about. I wish my father didn't hate you."

She turned to mount the stile which marked the Woodnesborough path.

"Perhaps the lion can someday be brought to meet the lamb without wishing to eat him."

"I fear not. He'll always want to make a titbit of you. I must away home, Mr. Godwyn, I've had a happy adventure this morning."

"There's the pigs and my Scotch cattle yet."

"I'll have to be content with good report of them."

She was gone with a smile. A hundred yards along the footpath she turned and saw him standing in the lane looking after her, and she waved her hand.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MEDICINE VENDOR

"THE pig that walks on its hind legs and dances for its food, that's the best thing in this here fair, squire. Away across there in the corner tent. Worth a penny any day."

Tweed, the miller, spoke as one who had measured carefully the competing attractions of the marionettes, the giant who could twist a horseshoe in two pieces with his hands, the woman with hair down to her heels, and the tumbler doing his contortions on a big kitchen table.

"What I'm searching for, Tweed, is the kind of pig which will get fat without valuable barley meal," said Harry Godwyn.

The miller scratched his head.

"And what would become of the likes of me, squire?"

"You'd probably give up milling for pig-breeding."

The squire strolled on into the heart of the fair, with memories of his boyhood days in almost every scene.

The scattered farms and hamlets within good walking distance—five miles or even more—always made festival at Sandwich Fair the second week in November. Carters and cowmen did double duty so that each in turn might have time for a visit. Women went with what remained of their harvest money tied in a corner of their handkerchiefs; tenant-holders, whose crops and

cattle provided good excuse for absence from church on Sunday, bestirred themselves for once. Some of the gentry too walked round the booths to see the fun, perchance to buy a new-fashioned riding whip with silver on the handle.

Harry Godwyn was edging his way through the crowd near the Bull Ring, when his father's friend, Squire Driver, clapped him on the shoulder.

"How's Brook House and all, Harry? Working hard, working hard, ay, I know that."

"We're building up again, squire."

"And wearing your clothes like a gentleman, Harry. What a limb you was as a boy! Let me have a real look at 'ee."

Squire Driver stood back in survey, his huge face shining with good humour.

"As good a sight as your own hogs and that's saying a lot. These young girls here they'll be paying you a penny a piece to dance with 'em. The handsome young squire, eh! You be careful, Harry. Lord, when I was your age!"

"Why, Harry, where have you been hiding these months? How did you unearth him, Squire Driver?"

Christopher Oxenden, a young man with curly red hair and turned-up nose, had his hand thrust out in welcome.

"I lugged him out of a rabbit-hole over at Ash," chuckled the old man.

"Called me a hog, Chris," said Harry Godwyn, "then lectured me out of his bad past about my doubtful behaviour to the young girls here."

"I hope, Squire Driver, you're not reforming," said Christopher Oxenden.

The old man shook his stick at the two of them.

"Get along, you rascals. Wish I was young enough to come with ye. I'll have a quart of beer and away home."

The young men had ready topics as they walked haphazard and halted now and again along by the line of booths on the northern side of the square: young Oxenden's country dullness and ambitions, his father's news from Westminster, Harry's struggle with affairs at Ash, the old squire's death, the fierce half-comic feud. Christopher Oxenden was almost lyrical about Edith Hardres.

"A pretty maid but proud I'm told," said Harry Godwyn. "She's at the fair to-day?"

"Been here and gone."

"Gone!"

"She met my mother, they went together. Some new puppies at Shepherd Whitwell's out at Stonar."

"She must have known a Godwyn was at hand," said Harry.

Christopher Oxenden laughed.

"I doubt she remembers your existence, lad. No malice rides with such a beauty."

"When a Hardres sees a Godwyn a day is spoilt," said Harry laughing in return.

Gone was she? Laggard! Dolt! Why had he not come early? His gorge rose that Tomlyn should have detained him about the early and unlooked-for calf. Officious, gossiping Lady Oxenden should be shut up in a cow pen. Puppies, forsooth! Had he not puppies at Brook House?

He went by the line of showmen and vendors towards "The Bell," anxious to be on his road home. An empty day, worse than an empty day. His one chance of a sight of her for weeks—a recognising smile, a word

among the crowd, some sign that the blackberrying was not a wayside incident which six weeks had blotted out! For what else had he come to Sandwich?

Harry had lost interest in the boisterous din, the gaping peasants, the fluent charlatans in front of their tents. Yet nevertheless one of the latter brought him to a halt; an itinerant healer who with long-winded phrases was seeking to draw pennies from his hearers. Harry Godwyn listened for a minute, then elbowed his way into the crowd to get a sight of the orator, a spare man with flowing white hair and white beard, strangely venerable for one whose voice was bell-like. Glibly came the patter describing the effect produced on rheums, toothache, colic, or cuts and burns and bruises.

"I stands before you the possessor of herbals rarely distilled and compounded, which are solvent against most of the ills of suffering humanity, and I have ointments which make bruises a laughing matter, which stop bleeding from cuts, cure adders' stings, and wipe away the pain of burns as the wind lifts a hat from the head."

He sold a packet here and there with a witticism for the purchaser thrown in, and Harry Godwyn, with what had been the purpose of his visit to Sandwich driven from his thoughts, watched those bright eyes and listened to that clear voice with shock which deepened every minute.

"And between the whiles of supplying you with cures and salves which have set London in commotion, which are known in every county in England and are used at the court of France, I will show you, such of you who feel the thirst for knowledge, the spring of these discoveries. To heal the human body, the human body must be known. I have within this tent

the noted skeleton of Antwerp, the skeleton from which many of the noted surgeons and doctors of Europe have descried Nature's secrets—the human body in outline—the study of which has enabled me to bring you here, to Sandwich, palliatives and restoratives, unguents and ointments for which you will bless me for a year to come. Only two pennies——"

Harry Godwyn stepped forward and extended a silver piece.

"This way, my lord. You shall be the first to observe and note——"

The flap of the tent fell behind the two men as they entered, and most of the group began to stroll to other diversions, though a few remained in lazy curiosity for the reappearance of the versatile sage. They had to wait a full five minutes.

Inside the tent were flickering candles dimly lighting the skeleton fastened with string to an upright beam, grim relic to watch the faces of those who faced each other in front of it.

"I know of the old man's death."

"Why are you back in Kent?"

"To make a little money at Sandwich fair, Harry, but also to get something of what is due to me."

"Due to you?"

"Aye, and will you deny me?"

"Where have you been, what evil work——?"

"Evil work! Have I not drawn sword for the Protestant Faith."

"You were in the Monmouth business?"

"Journeyed from Holland with Dicky Rumbold. I can sing a hymn with the best. I found salvation early."

"How came you safe?"

"Why, Harry, I judged I was not good enough for hanging. Skipped Kirke's lambs after Sedgemoor, and now a mountebank. 'Twas not so great a change. Harry, what about money?"

"I have five guineas in my pocket."

"Five guineas?"

"'Tis all for the present. Give me a place where I can find you in London, and expect but little."

"Sullen words, Harry, those last, but I'll wait to see how far I cavil. You'll get word of Tom Night at 'The Cock' in Fleet Street or 'The Lamb and Flag' in Rose Street, Covent Garden,—if not one week, well then another. Tell me, Harry, how have ye dealt with Hardres for killing the old man?"

"What is that to you?"

"Ods blood, he owes for it. Harry, I have revenge for you. I saw the wench to-day; she is much to be desired. Take her, man, take her. Up with her on your crupper and——"

"Your clients outside will get tired of waiting. Is there aught else?"

"Aught else you ask? I want my inheritance and mark you I'll have it. Further, I carry no benevolence to Hardres after all that's happened and we owe——"

"Spare me a son's affection!"

"Sneer as you will, I'll have my rights."

"Pray that your deserts don't reach you first. I'll seek for you in London."

The other lifted the flap of the tent.

"My Lord, your appreciation is what I expected from your rank and intelligence. You have seen one of the sights from which learning draws its nourishment and I trust that others here will now follow your example."

He bowed low as Harry passed out.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

LORD Dover, Captain of the King's Guard, and newly a member of the Council, had not the statecraft of the Earl of Sunderland nor any of the subtleties which marked the Lord Treasurer, yet in one quality he was his equal; he had promptness in any task, a thoroughness in all he set his hand to, good or bad, and thus it was that both were present a minute or more before the appointed hour. They stood side by side looking through the window out on to the sun-flecked Thames, with some scattered talk, the two of them—as much a contrast to the eye as in things hidden. In years they were little separated, yet Dover was a young man, Sunderland an old one.

The soldier was in scarlet coat relieved by snowy lace, rings were on his fingers, his shoe buckles were of silver, and his slim figure was as straight as his rapier. The hard and glittering gallant, known for so long as Harry Jermyn, was no less dangerous nor any more so as Lord Dover. His blade was as ready and as skilful, his ruthlessness for women unabated, his odd, deep friendship for the King burned brightly as ever. The bearing of him, the stare of his wide eyes told of vigour, gave a hint of no particular reverence for the reputation of his companion—a man whose every hour was laden with the thought of consequences. The Lord Treasurer indeed was at the poles from Dover. Plainness and

sombreness were in his very dress, black for the most part. No sword was by his side.

"The Countess of Dorchester is in London again," said Dover.

Sunderland took his gaze from a sailing-boat making for the Lambeth shore.

"They come and go. Sedley's incursions need worry no one but the Queen."

"She talks much."

"In that there was always safety."

Dover looked at Sunderland curiously.

"You never found women an incitement, my lord. By chance you may under-value them."

"I recognise them as disturbances," said Sunderland blandly. "Now and again I make provision."

"Faith, you've missed a lot in life. Cold blood, my lord."

"Some gifts pass us by," said Sunderland.

"If 'tis not in one's bones——" Dover shrugged his shoulders. "I dare say you have compensations."

"I can look on."

"You'll keep your eyes from some of us, I hope," said Dover laughing. "You think there is no danger in the Sedley woman? Pushing herself to court again——"

"A thousand Sedleys could not advance the tide or keep it back."

"Nearing thirty, with long nose and thin lips, and she holds him still in spite of banishment and pension."

"He always had a twist for ugliness in women."

"Salt among the sugar. I'd not trust His Majesty with any sweet young thing I had my eyes on."

"He has no time for women now. For Sedley a

quaint affection as a legacy, that is all. The King grows older."

"You belittle James. I'll swear he's still an open heart if not an open mind. Who's to blame him? I hope I'll die before I wither. Do I hear them?"

A door of the chamber was thrown open.

"The King, my lords."

The usher held back a brocaded curtain to admit a man of middle height and build, whose swarthy face was deep-lined with care and past tempers. He was clad in black velvet, with jewelled buttons down the front of him, and his sword hilt was of gold. Brooding was in his eyes; his large mouth was pouting: a man with fire in him, one not to be despised or altogether trusted. James carried the command and authority of his race as well as their defects.

He listened abstractedly to words in an undertone from Lord Godolphin at his elbow, and, without losing his attention, he threw a nod in acknowledgment of the obeisance of Sunderland and Dover. Behind the King and Godolphin came three others, Sir Edward Hales, constable of the Tower, Lord Jeffreys, the Lord Chancellor, and Father Petre, the priest whose elevation to the Council had been the scandal of the coffee-houses.

At a table on which lay many papers the Council found their seats, with Sunderland on the King's right, Godolphin on his left, and James set to the reading of the documents before him. He found nothing to his liking, his frown grew more perceptible, and at the end of a minute he wrapped out "Odious." He put his clenched fist on the table.

"They howl."

"The rabble would be King—if they had not a King," commented Dover.

"You're no faint-heart, Harry."

"Nor others present, with submission, sire," said Sunderland.

"You mean well, you mean well," said James impatiently. "Yet there has been too much of a faltering. I'll have a firmer grip."

Godolphin moved in his chair. "A loose rein has its uses."

The King turned on him.

"With crowds still yelping on the acquittal."

Godolphin was not to be put down.

"There were divers opinions as to the wisdom of sending the bishops to the Tower."

"And it is with pliancy I must meet rebellion! In one direction only was I wrong, that of the judges. Jeffreys, see to it that Sir Richard Holloway and Sir John Powell receive their quietus as justices of the King's Bench."

"This afternoon it shall be done, sire."

"I have been but too lenient. Did I not deal with Monmouth?"

"I am inclined to moderation, yet fear your Majesty is right," said Sunderland.

"Because the oak bends it does not break," persisted Godolphin.

"Oak! I am liker to a bulrush. I have not slept this night. At Hounslow yesterday, the very soldiers cheered the freeing of the bishops. Is not that a sign of general distemper?"

"A firm hand," muttered the priest.

"Aye, and a firm hand there shall be," exclaimed James.

"Your indignation, sire, may somewhat enlarge the situation," said Godolphin.

"Are you blind, Godolphin? They murmur and blaspheme at my doings with the French and with the Irish too. The mobile have their meetings. Nobles are banded together for treason. The bishops defy me. My religion is reviled. The son just born to me is said to be no son of mine. In truth 'tis time for action."

He looked fiercely round the Council.

"Water must be placed upon the flames," said Jeffreys.

Godolphin lifted his brows.

"I hope it may be water and not oil."

"I'll have my own way of it from now onwards—no more compounding," said James. "First my son, of whom they have such horrid doubts. Sunderland, a patent is to be passed to create my son Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester."

Sunderland drew some paper to him, and took up a quill.

"Two Benedictines are to be nominated as chaplains to the Prince, Father Petre."

"The names shall be before your Majesty this evening."

James turned over some of the papers in front of him. "Godolphin, the High Commission to prepare a list of all priests who have refused to read the Indulgence from their pulpits."

"As you will, sire," said Godolphin, taking up a quill like Sunderland.

James went on with the reading of the documents which lay on the table; he twitched them over one by one. "Bristol, Gloucester, Bedford, Lichfield, all celebrating the acquittal of the bishops. Are the towns gone mad?"

He came to a letter which he read through twice.

"Would that 'twere a more important place. They shall sting. I'll take every plague spot as I find it. At Sandwich, one of the Cinque ports, the council has affronted me."

"Sandwich," exclaimed Hales, "a loyal old town."

"I have a different meaning for the word," said James. "The council met, with the mayor presiding, and a jurat brought forward a motion that a message of congratulations on the birth of the Prince should be sent. The council discussed it and decided there should be no message. What think you of that for loyalty?"

"They've had the scandal," said Hales.

James turned to Dover. "Harry, away with you to Sandwich. You have full powers. You may take away their charter."

"You took it from them three years agone," said Godolphin. "It is one of many places that have had their charters back."

The King bit his lip.

"Do as you will with them, Harry. You know my mind."

"Mayhap the town is not so much to blame as some enemy, sir," said Hales. "A gentleman of that part—there is one such—may have spread delusive calumny. I know Sandwich very well."

"Then talk with Lord Dover. Tell him all he should know. And if——"

A respectful knock at the door interrupted James, and as he turned his head he saw the curtain slowly moved to reveal the anxious face of Chiffinch, groom of the backstairs. Chiffinch had many confidential functions, but the interruption of a Council was not one of them. Caution and discretion were part of the man and of his work. All in the room knew it, knew that

nothing but some compelling emergency could have drawn him to this boldness.

"What is it, Chiffinch?" demanded the King.

Chiffinch glided across the room and whispered in his royal master's ear.

"Impossible. Tell her I'll see her thirty minutes hence."

Chiffinch whispered again, and James stroked his chin. "I've no doubt it's important, but not now. Tell her——"

He got no further for the door opened, the curtain was swept aside impetuously and a woman stepped into the room. Catherine Sedley, Countess of Dorchester, was no mean figure despite her so-called plainness; and some found a pleasant change from the pretty dolls of Whitehall in the wide, sensible mouth, the fearless eyes, with humour behind them, the mannish assurance with its touch of coarseness.

"Pardon, sir, for this invasion. But I could wait no longer."

The men were on their feet, the King knocking his hand on the top of his chair in irritation.

"I am in Council, madam."

"That is why I am here."

She walked forward as she spoke to within a couple of yards of the group.

"La, look not so struck all of you, the King sometimes calls me madam." She turned to James. "I am here, sir, on an affair of moment. I perceive you are displeased. Be so good as to hear me."

"This is an intrusion," said James severely. "I cannot listen now. Godolphin, perhaps you will——"

"Intrusion and interruption! Yes, and is it not time for intrusions and interruptions? You'll have less

friendly ones. The coffee-houses are ringing with the story of a warming pan. You all know it. Your army crumbling. Oh, I'll shake you. What are you doing, tell me that? "

Her breasts rose and fell, her head was held high, defiance and resentment sparkled from her. Yet it was not so much Catherine Sedley's challenge to the King that held the men before her silent and motionless, as the menace of that which as yet was left unspoken. She had not broken in upon the Council to attack them. Not one there but asked himself her secret.

James shared the intuitions of his Council and other feelings moved in him. He had agreed that Sedley should be removed from her dominion, but his consent had been reluctant. She had held his affections longer than any woman; he never could be angry with her for a great while. And now, during her outburst, perhaps partly as the result of it, his irritation ebbed. She had always been a true friend to him, a wise one too.

" Gentlemen," he said, " the Council is at an end. You have my directions. See that they are swiftly put to effect. Harry, you'll leave for Kent to-day."

" Within two hours, sire," said Dover.

" Why goes he to Kent? " demanded Catherine Sedley.

" To stamp out a nest of wasps."

" Harry Jermyn is more at home among butterflies. I'll tell you one thing, sir, Kent is the home of pretty women. He'll come back with another light o' love if it's a three days' visit only, two if it's a week."

James waved his hand towards the table.

" You have my permission to retire, my lords."

" Not yet, sir, I have something they must learn

as well as you. Here's the reason. Everyone of them's a Catholic intriguer——"

"Stop, Catherine," said the King: "I am a Catholic myself."

"To my eternal sorrow and that of nine out of every ten of your Majesty's subjects. Yes, you're all Catholics. I'm a Protestant. I'm here to betray the Protestant cause."

She stood and faced them.

"The Countess is overwrought," remarked Sunderland, gently.

"Proceed, Catherine." James was all gravity and sternness.

"Within the last few hours a message has gone across the water to your son-in-law, the Prince of Orange, inviting him in the name of the people of England to come here with an army and dispossess Your Majesty and seize the throne. That's my news."

The ticking of a clock on the wall near the window could be heard. The Countess had time to fold her arms across her breast and unfold them again before the King spoke.

"Incredible—yet——"

They all stood silent except Dover who made bold to laugh. "Such stories are given out daily. Another bubble."

"Can the Countess tell us more of what she has heard?" asked Father Petre.

"The invitation was signed by Devonshire, Shrewsbury, Lumley, by Churchmen and Presbyterians. Herbert took it over to the Prince. Sydney, with others, has been in Holland a long time. The Prince is preparing."

"Preparing!" exclaimed James.

"The Prince has been gathering ships, troops and arms ostensibly against the French," said Godolphin.

"Yes, against the French," repeated James.

"The Countess brings us an old wives' tale," said Dover. "Are we to be frightened by an old wives' tale?"

The Countess looked at the King.

"This has cost me something, your Majesty."

He smiled at her. "No one ever questioned your devotion, Catherine." He held out his hand to her, she took it and they passed towards the door. As they reached the curtain she turned a look back towards the table. "All the same, Harry Jermyn, you'd best gather your fresh flowers while you may."

CHAPTER FIVE

A MESSAGE FROM THE KING

HARRY JERMYN, Lord Dover, rode into Sandwich on a sunny morning, displeased at the dusty roads, frowning at the smell of low tide in the estuary. He had lain the night at Canterbury, "a hole of a place," had suffered indifferent wine and a hard bed at a lodging provided by the colonel of the regiment there, and had been galled by the cheery and persistent curiosity of the colonel. The twelve mile ride to Sandwich that morning had been lengthened to fourteen by a fallen elm, and a circuit through rutty lanes, had, he imagined, been added to by the misguiding directions of heavy-headed yokels.

Altogether the Captain of the King's Guard was in no very good humour when he lifted himself from his horse outside "The Bell" tavern. His commands for a room and a meal and for attention to his horse were curt and penetrating, and "The Bell" was speedily in respectful ferment. Jim Bales, the boy-of-all-work, in his excitement, clumsily crossed in front of the visitor at the foot of the stairs with a dish of steaming potatoes and was frightened almost to disaster by a fierce one-word oath. "He was the nobility all right," said Jim in the taproom. Mistress Breming announced that a lord, who had come all the way from London, had a right to be in a temper if he liked.

Within fifteen minutes Host Breming with his own hand was serving the distinguished traveller beef and ale.

" 'Tis the first time I've waited on the nobility since I handed good Queen Katherine a tankard at these very steps sixteen years agone. Will your lordship rest the night? "

" You talk too much. Is my horse well tended? "

" John Whetton is rubbing him down, your lordship; he has half a peck of oats."

" Wash his fetlocks thoroughly with cold water. Who is the mayor of this town? "

" Master Sackett—Jeffery Sackett, the weaver. He has six looms. His house is——"

" Send for him."

" Send for the mayor? "

His lordship looked up from his plate.

" Assuredly, my lord; it shall be done this minute."

Out in the passage Host Breming rubbed his hands together. " The mayor," he said to himself. " Who ever heard tell? "

But Jeffery Sackett, with an acuteness which had helped to make him the third richest man in Sandwich, did not stand on the rights of his office on hearing the summons, and paused but long enough to put on his plum-coloured Sunday coat and within half an hour was at " The Bell."

When he entered the parlour a slight man with bright, searching eyes was standing, back to the window, with his hands clasped behind him.

" You are the mayor? "

" Yes, my lord; by name Jeffery Sackett. We are glad to welcome——"

" I am Lord Dover, a member of His Majesty's Privy

Council, and I am the bearer of a message from the King. He is displeased with you."

"With me, my lord?"

"With the town of Sandwich. How quickly can you gather a meeting of townspeople?"

"The freemen—'twill not take long—an hour, maybe. I'll get the councillors and jurats——"

"Gather all who are of consequence."

"If your lordship will inform me as to our offence——"

"That is best told to the assembly."

The mayor was not used to snubbing.

"Sandwich has its liberties, my lord——"

"But may take none with the King's representative," said Jermyn. "I can excuse you now, Mr. Mayor."

Half an hour later, Harry Jermyn, looking from the window into the street, saw the stir which had ensued from his order: men in front of the shops taking off their aprons with a slow word or two to each other as they did so, women with baskets of butter and eggs gathering to talk together, boys racing along with shouts that the King had come to Sandwich. Lord Dover scowled to himself. Was there no other to be sent to stir an ant-hill, that week of all weeks, with Mistress Sybil Putley at the Duke's Theatre, and Hamilton pressing for her favour? He thought of the seventy miles between himself and the Duke's Theatre—to say nothing of the Coca Tree and Pontack's.

The wardman, in ancient blazoned costume, appeared along the roadway, and nearby "The Bell" he blew a great brazen horn three times as preface to the announcement of a common meeting in the Guildhall, and heads were thrown from windows and those who had not

already heard the news came scurrying from the side paths and alleys.

With a crowd of boys around him the wardman passed on, and Lord Dover, turning his eyes to the end of the street, had an agreeable turn given to his thoughts, a passing lift of his ill mood. An attractive young creature, surely! The girl was approaching with a thin old man, whose straight back belied his white hair —probably her father. She was rippling at some remark, and Dover thought he had never seen such lively charm in one who was born to be admired for her regular features; the merry ones generally had turned-up noses. As she came nearer he was able to take her into account in detail, the quick, full mouth, the ever-changing dark-blue eyes with little pursings round them, the dove-grey hood thrust back and the curls dancing forth unasked, the sun's brown dusted on an ivory skin. Dover described the girl afterwards to Grammont. "She was no milkmaid, but you knew she had never seen a court. 'Twas not her beauty altogether. There are some like it. I have met but two in life."

As Dover stood by the window drinking her in, a tiny boy, running across the street, kicked against a loose cobble and fell, and howls rose to the sky. The girl ran from her father's side with the freedom of one country bred, lifted the child, brushed the gravel from his knees, smoothed his hair and whispered in his ear. The howling sank away to sobs. From some recess in her dress she found an apple, and the sobs faded and smiles came to the tear-streaked face. Then the girl went back to her father, and Dover noticed she had a dimple in her chin. He watched them till they had disappeared down a passage leading towards the market.

Then he went across the room and rang the bell, and Host Breming came hastening in.

" Is there any message from the mayor? "

" I am standing at the door awaiting it, my lord."

" Who were the old man and the girl who passed this way a minute since? "

" Sir Valentine Hardres and his daughter. They live at Woodnesborough Hall."

" That is all I wish to know. You may go."

Within the hour as promised the mayor had assembled a meeting, and as Dover strode into the assembly chamber at the Guildhall he found two score of freemen, and most of the jurats and council men. Some, like the mayor, had put on their fine coats, others were in working clothes from the loom and the warehouse. Maundey, the deputy mayor, was wearing his new periwig.

Harry Godwyn leant against the wall, tapping his knee with his riding switch, and on the other side of the chamber Sir Valentine Hardres and his daughter were near a group of shopkeepers.

Through the gathering, looking neither to right nor left, passed Lord Dover, a smallish man, knitted and springy, helped by the rich becomingness of his dress. The dust had been taken from his riding boots, and his spurs were bright like silver; from the skirts of his dark-blue coat protruded the polished hilt of his small sword; his collar of lace from Malines was nearly a foot deep, and his hat carried a big drooping white feather.

The people, bare-headed, were in silence as he made for the dais where the mayor was in the carved oak chair which for centuries had been the seat of the town's chief magistrate.

" Citizens of Sandwich," said Dover, " I am here

with a message from the King. He has been grieved by the behaviour of certain who live among you. Two weeks ago a loyal jurat, by name Bartholomew Coombes, brought forward at a meeting of the council, an address congratulating His Majesty on the birth of the Prince of Wales. His Majesty is graciously pleased with the dutiful homage of Master Coombes. He wishes me to express his displeasure at the discussion which followed the proposal of Master Coombes. He learns that the council decided not to present the address, that there were those who, aspersing the King's honour, declared that their Majesties were, in fact, without a son."

"How was we to know, my lord?" interrupted Syme, the blacksmith.

"Some of you are affected with a distrust of your Sovereign which clouds all you hear. I tell you now that as a Privy Councillor I was among those called to the room when the prince was born."

"You're a Papish, are ye not, my lord?"

It was a jurat who spoke this time, Linton, of the brickyard on the Deal road, and his remark drew forth appreciative murmurs.

"You are to learn that His Majesty intends sure and quick punishment for sedition. He places it on you, Mr. Mayor, to discover and seize any who by word or action express disaffection within your town. Wicked mouths must be stopped. Any who are seized must be conveyed to Dover Castle to await the King's pleasure. If they possess horses you are to be sure these are taken as well as their masters. The King has been dissatisfied with Sandwich. If faction is unchecked he will put the town under penalties."

A buzz spread round the room as Dover finished speaking; it dwindled away as the mayor rose to his feet.

" Sandwich is a loyal town," he said. " The citizens wish to convey to His Majesty their dutiful obedience. We hope our rights as freemen——"

" Protestant religion," shouted a ship-worker at the back of the chamber.

" The lord's a Papish," called out Syme, and there was a smother of words and a shuffling of feet.

" I find but little evidence of the loyalty you speak of," said Dover, grimly. " The King——"

" Is he a Protestant? " came raucously from the ship-worker.

Dover was calm, too calm would have said those who knew him best.

" The King supports the national church," he said, " but he wishes his people to be free. He has provided exceptions so that those who desire some other forms of worship shall not be made to suffer."

" That was for the Papishes," cried the blacksmith.

" Be quiet, Syme," said the mayor.

" I should like to ask why the King displaced John Wheeler from being a jurat last year? " asked the brick-maker. " He was a Nonconformist."

Dover raised his hand.

" I must fulfil my message from His Majesty; I had hoped it would not be necessary. If these seditious persons in Sandwich are not seized—there are some in this room, Mr. Mayor—if there is a continuing of this factiousness—I am to tell you that your charter will be forfeited."

" Again! "

" This time for good. The King demands obedience from his subjects. Your market privileges will be taken from you. The King has no love for rebels."

The stillness that fell upon the gathering was broken by Sir Valentine Hardres.

"I cannot think, my lord, the King would thus dispossess and burden an ancient town. How is it possible the mayor can set a watch on the tongue of every citizen?"

"It is necessary that he should do it."

"Then, my lord, you'd best prepare for trouble," said Hardres, and there was clapping of hands and many shouts of "Hear, Hardres. Hear, Hardres."

Harry Godwyn, on the other side of the hall, stepped a yard forward.

"My lord, you must not take away an erroneous thought about Sandwich." He was as assured as Hardres, but his words had not the fighting note of the old baronet. "Here and there may be heard a grumble. Was ever Englishman without the privilege? I'll vouch for every man here."

"You'll not vouch for me," exclaimed Hardres. "I speak for myself."

"I'll vouch for all but Sir Valentine Hardres."

Then Dover broke in and his tone was friendly. "I am sure Sir Valentine Hardres is the foremost for his King."

"I too am sure of that," said the squire.

"I'll take no dictation from Ash," cried Hardres hotly.

The squire waved his hand as though in apology.

"I beg the noble lord not to make too harsh a report of us. There are many humble people in Sandwich who would be ruined by the measures he has threatened."

Jermyn bent with a whispered enquiry to the mayor at his side. His voice was without feeling as he looked

up. "I will weigh what has been said by Sir Valentine Hardres and Squire Godwyn. I can promise Sandwich no immunity in ill-doing. I have to consider whether my warning is likely to be sufficient."

As he stepped down from the dais he half turned, "Mr. Mayor, I require your attendance at the inn an hour from now."

Without waiting for an answer he walked through the gathering which was now on the move, and men fell back to give him passage, all eyes for this trim determined servant of the King.

Outside in the square, a dozen yards from the door, Dover stood, ignoring the attention he drew to himself from knots of citizens. Hardres and his daughter were almost the last to come from the hall, and directly they appeared Dover went towards them, hat in hand.

"Our introduction was irregular at the meeting. May I present myself more formally?"

Here was a new Lord Dover, smooth-voiced, almost deferential.

"At your service, my lord. This is my daughter."

Dover made his bow, low but not too low, for he was no beginner and had made a judgment about the girl.

"I hope I did not appear a tyrant, Mistress Hardres. My duty was not a pleasant one."

"I was thrilled by it all, but not very happy."

Her eyes were laden with curiosity at this extraordinary man, so gay, so kindly, withal so hard.

"I think, my lord, you were somewhat heavy on our people."

Dover replied with hesitation.

"The King was strongly incensed, Sir Valentine."

"His Majesty has been misinformed, or small things

have been grossly magnified. To have sent you on such a mission was an insult to you."

"Yet I am glad I came," said Dover slowly. "Do you remember two years ago giving good help to a friend of mine, Sir Nicholas Bretherton?"

"Was Bretherton a friend of yours? A small affair."

"I do not rank it so. I have not forgotten what he said of you. Bretherton was my good friend. Gone to his account this six months."

"Little enough I did. I was in the town on a market day when Bretherton was passing through and the crowd hooted him and a stone was thrown. He was a Catholic."

"What you did then for my friend has made me glad that I and no one else was sent to Sandwich on this occasion."

The baronet looked fixedly at Dover.

"What is behind your words, my lord?"

Dover looked round at the silent and curious groups of people who stood scattered about them.

"Let us take the hospitality of the Guildhall porch," he said, and he stepped towards it, followed by Hardres and his daughter.

"I wish to run no risk of being overheard. You are an old soldier, Sir Valentine, and will desire me to be forthright in what I have to tell you."

"The shorter the better."

"Sir Edward Hales has mentioned you as leader in Sandwich of this discontent—the fomenter of these grumblings."

"The dastard, I'll——"

"The King is enraged on many matters in the country. An angered man on impulse——"

"Did you have orders to arrest my father?" interrupted Edith.

"It is hard to refuse a lady's question," said Jermyn, with a smile. "It must be done. You will know at least why I am glad I came to Sandwich."

"By Heaven, arrest me if you want to, my lord. That is your task, is it? Everyone here knows me. Sir James Oxenden, Colonel Tooke at Dover Castle, Mr. Strode, the member. But do your duty, my lord, do your duty."

"I am engaged upon it. That is why I am talking to you thus in private."

Sir Valentine spluttered, "I am obliged to you, my lord, I am obliged. But 'tis preposterous."

"I am glad I came to Sandwich if only because I have been able to put you on your guard. Nick Bretherton—he and I went through much together."

Jermyn's voice had memories in it.

"And also, if I may say so, for your own sake and that of Mistress Hardres."

Sir Valentine found it hard to spit out his thanks.

"One final word, perhaps the most important. If by chance I should be away when Hales brings fresh tales to Court and if—it is not impossible—you should be subject to unpleasantness, you will, I beg, remember you have a friend in London on whom you may rest with certainty. Harry Jermyn is not without his influence."

He made a step towards the door and Edith held out her hand. He bent low and kissed it.

"You will believe, my lord, that my father and I are truly grateful to you and always shall be."

"I trust I may some day better deserve thanks. Your servant, Sir Valentine."

By the time Edith and her father had reached the Woodnesborough gate on their way home she had extracted from him some of the reason for his gruffness to Lord Dover.

"I don't like his master, I don't like his mission, and until five minutes ago I didn't like the man."

"What is wrong with him?"

"Harry Jermyn has been known for years—he is not young—he is a successful lover."

"Women would admire such a man."

"They would, would they? He is a notorious gamester, and he is a Catholic."

"Which is the worst of the two?" asked Edith.

"He is a duellist, he has killed three, if not four, men."

"You never can tell what wrongs he has suffered. He is brave, you can see that. He had a hateful task in the Guildhall. He had to say what he did. I like him, father, after the way he talked to us. Had he not gentility and kindness?"

"Curse him. Why was he kind?"

"You're a hard-grained, obstinate, suspicious old gentleman," said Edith.

Lord Dover walked back to "The Bell" tavern to find the mayor in waiting for him in the parlour.

"Shut the door, Mr. Mayor. You may sit down. An ominous meeting to-day, I fear. Now tell me all you know about Sir Valentine Hardres and Squire Godwyn of Ash."

The mayor proceeded at considerable length to tell him.

CHAPTER SIX

CAPTAIN NIGHT FINDS AN EMPLOYER

LORD DOVER was a zestful gamester on occasion, but it was no desire for excitement with the dice that took him from Wills' Coffee House in Bow Street to the gaming-house in Lincoln's Inn Fields on the evening of his return from Kent. Mr. Dryden had been more than usually tiring, with his circle of adulators buzzing emptily around him, and Dover, restless by reason of a stratagem as yet incomplete in all its parts, went round to Lincoln's Inn Fields partly from habit, partly in the hope that an hour's play and the winning of a few guineas might put him in more fertile mood. The core of the plan was in him.

Play was going on in a string of three rooms opening out of each other, and around a dozen tables was the assembly, motley as always,—gallants, young and middle-aged, in gay silk coats and drooping lace, merchants in broadcloth on a spasmodic dissipation, country youths in homespun wasting their fathers' guineas, a soldier in well-worn scarlet fighting a duel for shillings with a taverner. No barricades of pride or class in the Lincoln's Inn Fields gaming-house; plain gentlemen and gentlemen of fortune were met on common ground; from the same table came orders to the drawer for cans of flip, or bottles of Alicante or sack, the only inequality between the players—gains or losses.

Dover sauntered along to where two men in sober habit and great periwigs sat alone—the kind of men who, with dignity and solemnness might be staking a score of guineas every minute. One of them blinked up at him like an owl, and Dover looked at the coins on the table to find that they were playing for sixpences.

A group of young men, lawyers or law-students to judge by their gowns and books piled untidily beneath the table, were making fun out of the seriousness of a loser among them, who, for nearly an hour past, had found it impossible to throw a seven, and who was using all the devices common to those who wish to find favour with the sprites of chance. He tried throwing the dice with his left hand instead of his right, with two fingers instead of four, shook the box over his head, got up and walked round his chair three times. Still he could not throw a seven. He caught sight of Dover standing behind him.

"The devil at my elbow—no wonder!"

"Young friend," said Dover, "you have omitted the one gesture which, above all others, I have found of good omen when the dice fall wrongly."

"What is that, sir? What is that?" cried the petulant player, with the box in his hand.

"You should stand on your head on the floor, young friend, with your legs waving to and fro in the air. That, believe me, is the final sacrifice to the goddess."

The laughter of the others on top of the jeer was more than the unfortunate could stand, and he pushed back his chair and rose with threatening face.

"You're free with your insolence."

"I'm a hardened loser; 'twas but friendly advice."

"Take your ill-luck elsewhere. Who are you? Curse you!"

" You must be more courteous, young sir, if you wish to play in public."

Dover raised his finger towards Daniel Brown, the owner of the rooms, who stood over by the street door, a grey-haired man whose quick eyes lost little that was proceeding round the tables. He came obsequiously.

" Tell this young gentleman who I am."

" This, sir, is the celebrated Mr. Jermyn—I beg pardon, the Lord Dover."

" Harry Jermyn! " said the offended player, with dropped jaw.

" Sit down, you fool," cried one of his friends.

" And if I remark on the conduct of a table? "

" 'Tis a command, your lordship."

The young man sank to his seat, muttering explanations. Jermyn waved his hand.

" You may bring a bottle of canary for these gentlemen, Brown. What's the trouble over yonder? "

He pointed to a table where a player had risen to his feet and was removing his coat, using some oaths as he did so.

" Captain Night has been losing steadily. 'Tis some prank, perchance."

" Go, fetch the wine. Gentlemen, you will excuse me. To you, sir, I suggest a toast, ' Bad luck the mother of good fortune.' "

Almost before he had finished speaking he was moving off in the direction of Captain Night, who had placed his folded coat on the table by his side and had begun playing again with his three companions. One of these had a small heap of guineas in front of him and was throwing the dice to the pattering oaths and comment from the coatless man.

" A character," said Dover.

"He comes in frequently, a fly-by-night, sometimes with a pocketful of guineas, sometimes without a penny. More than once I have lent him a couple of crowns—he always pays back. I suspect the road from Oxford brings him grist."

"This pantomime?"

"He has lost his all."

Dover moved a yard nearer to the table.

"By the great little bodkin, I win a guinea. Bunting, I'll take the coin. Gad! I thought my shirt would have to go. Another guinea—I'll need to cut no throat to-night to get a breakfast!"

"Wilt have thy coat back, Tom?" said one.

"Not I; it brings me luck. Again! Two guineas this time. Swounds, I'll have the whole before I've finished."

He shook the leather dice-box violently.

"Come sixes! Come sixes! and save the paternal rent roll. Two fives and a four. 'Tis good enough, I'll swear."

So it proved. He drew in three guineas with a gust of jubilation.

"My horse down in the yard is yours, friend Borley, saddle and bridle in the keeping of Will Dixon, while leather-faced old Bunting claims my sword. Preen not yourselves. Within an hour I'll have three extra mounts myself."

"We'll buy 'em back with what you owe," chortled Bunting.

"The man's a horrid spoil-sport! I'd clean forgot the debts. Now, look ye, I've an estate in Kent——"

The three roared with laughter and flung across round oaths which were returned and multiplied. Something in the voice of the player in shirt-sleeves was

familiar to Dover, and he slowly circled the tables till he could catch a sight of the young man's face. His lordship, whom it was very hard to surprise, stood staring. So this was the explanation. Was it an explanation? Yet miracles did not happen in Lincoln's Inn Fields' gaming house. Dover gave the matter thought and permitted himself another minute of attention. He walked over to an empty table and, with a look, summoned Daniel Brown.

"I may have a use for this young man. Can he be hired?"

"I've but suspicions, my lord."

Jermyn took a heavy silken purse from an inside pocket and counted out twenty guineas.

"Go over near him. Presently he will lose the coin or two he's won. Tell him, with such inducements from yourself as may come to mind, that a friend awaits."

"Do I take this money?"

"Not so. It rests here for him."

Jermyn had to wait but half an hour, and then he saw Brown threading between the tables with Captain Night, the latter still without his coat and on his face alertness and curiosity. He had reached the limit with his fellow players, and no taunts or whirling words from him could move them. They had secured and shared the nine guineas with which he had entered the gaming-house, had permitted him a debt of five guineas and, finally, had secured his horse and equipment. At the end they had been generous: they would, they said, divide the cost of his coat among the three of them and make him a present of the garment. It was while he was delivering a blasphemous refusal, proffering as a free gift to them his shirt and breeches that Daniel

Brown had bent down from behind him and whispered in his ear. Whatever the deficiencies of young Captain Night, slowness of wit was not among them. His cascading oaths came to a stop while he listened and, before the message had been fully delivered, he was wearing the look of a man to whom good news had arrived.

"Say you so?" he remarked aloud when Daniel Brown had finished his few sentences. "The fellow's late."

He rose to follow the owner of the gaming-house.

"My father's steward has arrived. I may send him to settle with you. My coat remains as guerdon."

Captain Night was no fool to fly in the face of Providence, and when he reached the table where Jermyn sat, there was respect behind his boldness.

"I understand, sir, you wish to do me a civility."

"You do not overshoot the mark," said Jermyn. "Brown, I shall not need you further. I'm Lord Dover, Captain Night; you have seen me before."

"Have I?" The answer might have been an evasion from one playing a part, but to Jermyn it sounded like no such thing—a plain astonishment. Yet how could it be that? Here was evidence, clear as daylight—voice, build and manner, and no two men had those light-blue, twinkling eyes.

"I am right, am I not, Captain Night, in saying you are acquainted with a man named Hardres."

"Sir Valentine Hardres? Are you a friend of his? He killed——"

"There may be processes against Sir Valentine Hardres very soon?"

"He killed my—a relative of mine. Not with a blade. If 'tis to punish him——"

"Here's twenty guineas," said Jermyn. "Discharge your debts, regain your horse, get Daniel Brown to send it for you to the stable of your inn. I wish to have a talk with you. If I require your attendance in London for two weeks at payment, what would you say?"

"I'm a money-maker always," said Captain Night, "but I'm not making much just now. What payment for the two weeks say you? I'll owe you twenty guineas."

"You'll be that much in my debt and 'twill depend on your degree of service as to how much of it I forget."

"Reports of you are not displaced, my lord."

"There will be ingenious occupation for you, not beyond your skill, and possibly some little exercise of daring."

"The payment, the payment, there's the crux."

"One hundred guineas."

"I know no man with whom I'd like better to have a talk," said Captain Night.

He took up the pile of gold from the table and went across the room to return three minutes later with but part of it. When they were seated opposite each other with a bottle of wine between them, Dover said:

"I want to ask you a question. Are you the Squire of Ash?"

"Bluntly put, Lord Dover. You're the kind of man with whom I must be frank."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Dover.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW THE SQUIRE TOOK TOO MUCH WINE

FARMER LASLETT of Poulders lifted his quart of beer, made a steady and prolonged effort which eclipsed his bushy face and after recovery delivered himself to his companions in the porch of "The Red Lion."

"Pity they papishes in London hadn't been on the top of it."

He raised his empty pot towards the heap of ashes and dried twigs—all that remained of the bonfire made in Sandwich market some days before to celebrate the acquittal of the seven bishops in London.

"I don't know as I rightly understands what they bishops was put on trial for," said Lott, the maltster from Deal.

"If you went to Church as you should, Lott, you'd learn something," replied Farmer Laslett. "What they bishops wanted was to turn the papishes out of England."

"Neck and crop. Put 'em on ships and send 'em to plantations in Meriky," said Jenkins, the host of "The Red Lion." "Here comes the squire; he'll tell ye."

"He's a man, he is," said Laslett.

"Wears finer clothes than his father ever did," said the maltster, not in entire approval.

"And grows better wheat and better hogs," replied the farmer. "Respects to ye, squire."

"How do ye do, friend Laslett. Send for my horse,

Jenkins. Why, Lott, what brings you from Deal? Wasn't my barley up to sample? "

" Barley was all right, squire. It's all this here news."

" Deal overstrides itself with this wish for a corporation. A costly change."

" We'll get our charter some time, squire. You'll live to see Deal the size of Sandwich and twice as lively. But 'twas not of Deal we talked—'twas the news about the bishops, bishops up in London."

" Seems they turned some of the great men in London upside down," said Laslett. " These here papishes is what I mean. Taxes here and taxes there to keep 'em all with three wives apiece—French women, too."

" Reminds me of Solomon, or is it Sodom and Gomorrah? " said Jenkins. " Time we had an alteration."

" You baint in favour of any of these here papishes, squire? " said Laslett.

" Laslett, I go to service every Sunday, supporting church and King."

" Is it true the bishops want to send the papishes back to France and Spain and over to Meriky? " asked the maltster.

" I'll not swear what they want. Perhaps you're right. In London they'd clap you in the Tower for asking such a question, Lott. Bring my horse here, boy; I must away."

Harry Godwyn had his hand on the saddle when Laslett, standing on the steps of the inn looking across the market-place, stopped him.

" Who's this a-coming, squire? "

Rein in hand the young man went to his horse's head and saw approaching a cavalcade, which had entered by

the Ash and Wingham Road. No countrymen were these with their clatter and jingle and bright harness. Behind a leader in feathered hat and embroidered coat were troopers in red with scabbards rattling against their stirrup irons. They halted at the Guildhall and then, observing the group at "The Red Lion," the officer rode across. He pulled up his horse, and his voice had a touch of authority.

"I seek the house of the mayor——" His eye fell on Harry Godwyn and his manner changed. "May I ask, sir, if by any chance you are Squire Godwyn?"

"I am Squire Godwyn."

"A lucky shot, by Gad! You were described to me, squire. What could be better!"

"I, too, shall be overjoyed I am sure when you've done me the honour——"

"I am Captain Singleton. I come from Canterbury, —not long since from Hounslow."

He dismounted and went to his horse's head, and Harry Godwyn walked round to him.

"I've business with the mayor but hoped to meet you too. You were especially designated as one for counsel, squire. A commission from London."

"A commission from London?"

"'Tis by way of being secret, important too, they say, though for the life of me I can't see it. Why I have the task instead of Colonel Tooke at Dover Castle Heaven knows. Give me guidance about the mayor."

"Mr. Sackett is an old friend. If you care to come with me——"

"First I'll take my men to the tavern. We may have to rest the night."

"I have some freedom with the mayor. I'll await you at his house—the one yonder at the corner of the

market-place with the oak beams and cornices and the wide door."

"Your grateful servant, squire."

Harry Godwyn sent his horse back to the stable of "The Red Lion," and walked across to the house of Mayor Sackett. The burly master-weaver opened the door himself.

"If it's not the squire! You missed last market-day. Come in, come in!"

"I would not thus push on you——"

"I wish we saw you oftener. Annie, here's Mr. Godwyn—he'll stay to supper. You'll stay to supper, squire?"

"You're very good. I'll make myself that much at home. I want to speak to you——"

"The table's partly laid, the girl's in and out—you won't mind that. Give me your hat." The weaver forced his visitor to a chair.

"A quick word while we're alone, Mr. Sackett. Captain Singleton from Canterbury, with six dragoons is here to see you. He rests at 'The Bell.'"

"Dragoons! What's their concern with me, squire?"

"I did not learn, but you'll soon hear. He'll be knocking at the door any minute."

The mayor rubbed his hand across his forehead.

"Can it be about Lord Dover? His lordship was very threatening—'tis but little more than a week since."

"Probably a further admonition backed by the sight of red coats."

"It looks like something worse."

"They'll not send Captain Singleton with troopers to capture recalcitrants like Syme or Linton."

"Maundey has been grumbling about the King.

Shedly—he's the oldest jurat—is nearly as bad. What ought I to do if——"

"Ask Singleton to supper. You're the loyalest of mayors."

"Give me a minute for the kitchen."

The mayor trotted off along the passage to the back of the house, and when he returned he said:

"I've sent round to 'The Bell' with word to let the soldiers have what beer they want."

"As important as the captain's supper."

"I'm glad you're to be here with us, squire."

"I'm somehow in the business," said Harry Godwyn.

The mayor's disturbance was lessened on the arrival of Captain Singleton, with his geniality and protestations.

"I've orders from London: do this and do that they say; enlist Master Jeffery Sackett, speak fair to the squire—and am I not about it—the first part of my work. I will not engage too deeply—for a hungry man can do no duty square and thorough. An hour's time perhaps if I may then intrude? I but introduce myself. They have some cold beef at the inn."

"Give us the pleasure, captain. We start supper in ten minutes."

Captain Singleton declared himself naught but a marauder to take so much advantage.

"You will offend my wife if you do not stay—she's cooking trout this moment."

"Trout, say you——" The captain appeared to hesitate—but not for long. "Trout breaks down my manners; with so much kindness in the invitation."

There was more than trout for supper; baked lambs' hearts, two cockerels to follow and a smoking ham, with strong beer, claret and canary, and the captain conquered

the buxom Mistress Sackett as much by his appetite as his compliments. The King had not such cooking, he asserted; he begged her for the recipe for the barley broth, with the taste of red currant wine in it. And once, when Jeffery Sackett asked him how long he stayed in Sandwich, the captain tossed a hand reproachfully.

"Break not this harmony, Mr. Mayor; a sacrilege."

When at last the meal came to an end, mother and daughter went their way to the parlour, not without visible regret in Annie Sackett, who for once had been deflected from her usual wide-eyed admiration for the squire. The mayor clicked the door behind them, and drew over it the heavy tapestry hanging. He handed a clean pipe to Captain Singleton, another to the squire and drew some bottles from a sideboard.

"It's natural that I'm curious, captain?"

The captain pulled away at his pipe before replying:

"I fought in Italy, on the Rhine and in the Low Countries, and fighting is the cleanest job a soldier has to set his hand to."

"There are many kinds of fighting," said the mayor, wondering whither his guest was leading.

"Only one kind that I know," said the captain. "In peace time soldiers are put to dirty work."

"Meaning your errand here?" said Harry Godwyn.

"I've to stir myself unpleasantly."

"I gather you've to make an arrest, captain," said Harry Godwyn placidly. "Have you come for the mayor or for me?"

"After such a supper! A soldier is not so ungrateful."

"We can face the worst cheerfully now," said the mayor.

" 'Tis bad enough, I fear, you'll find. First I have to give you this."

He took two letters from his coat, one of which he handed to the mayor, who read it aloud.

To the Mayor of Sandwich, greetings.

Our will and pleasure is, and we hereby authorise and direct you to afford all the assistance in your power, whether in person or by the exercise of your office, to the bearer of this letter, Captain Singleton, who is engaged by our command in removing strife and securing peace among our subjects at Sandwich, some of whom have lately manifested a spirit of disaffection.

Given at our Court of Whitehall.

JAMES.

" The King's writing—his own writing! " said the mayor.

" His signature—that much."

" What am I to do? " The mayor fell to reading the letter again.

" Am I not also the subject of a royal command? " asked Harry Godwyn.

Captain Singleton narrowed his eyes good-humouredly.

" So well disposed, you need nothing but a hint as to where service may be given! What it is to have a reputation! I learn that you, like your father before you, have justly appraised the vexatious gentleman whom it is my duty to arrest to-night."

The mayor put down the letter in his lap.

" Who may that be? "

" I am under orders, signed by the King's own hand

as are your own, to convey with all speed to London the person of Sir Valentine Hardres."

"Hardres!" exclaimed the mayor.

Godwyn made believe to light his pipe afresh and then he said:

"Is the man really disloyal?"

"He makes trouble here I'm told."

"Hardres!" repeated the mayor, unable to recover himself.

Godwyn helped himself liberally from the bottle of Canary on the table.

"My task is to take him," said Singleton; "others will make judgment."

The mayor got on to his feet.

"Sir Valentine Hardres has done nothing ill. He goes to Church each Sunday. He is well respected. Is this some mis-timed joke?"

"No joke and that's the truth of it, Mr. Mayor."

"This is no joke," said Harry Godwyn thickly, and the mayor had a perception that his young friend had been drinking freely.

"He has an enemy; none but an enemy could have devised this. Why should you have come to us at Sandwich?"

"Four men sleep at Woodnesborough Hall, and with Hardres an old soldier we should need a troop to take the place. I require you to lead the way to-night, Mr. Sackett. The Mayor of Sandwich will not be refused entry to Woodnesborough Hall."

Jeffery Sackett stood with mouth agape.

"An excuse is easy. You are the mayor, a Justice of the Peace. Soldiers have come from Canterbury—you need his counsel."

"What are you asking?" said the horrified mayor.

" Sir Valentine Hardres is a friendly gentleman to me."

" He's a pest," said Harry Godwyn, who had been drinking more wine.

" I can count on you, squire? "

" You give me a pistol and you'll see! "

" You, Squire Godwyn! " said the mayor.

" He fought at Worcester, the Roundhead rogue! My father knew him—I know him too! "

" Mr. Mayor, 'tis hard for you, I doubt not," said Singleton. " I should feel the same, but you have the King's order in your hand."

Jeffery Sackett was not a man of great imagination, but as he stood there facing this good-natured but determined soldier, he realised the catastrophe that was come upon him. His duty—was it his duty? The King's order, signed with his own hand! He wished most heartily he was not mayor.

" Captain, it is impossible that I should be Judas towards a friendly neighbour."

With all his rotundity and double chin, Jeffery Sackett was no unworthy figure.

" Mr. Mayor, a public officer like you cannot put on one side his responsibilities."

" Let us go without him," said the squire, who had become more talkative under his wine. I'll get the old Roundhead out of bed for you. He'll not suspect——"

Godwyn's tirade was interrupted by a loud knock at the street door. Captain Singleton rose up from his seat.

" One of my men from ' The Bell '? "

" Jurat Palmer said he might look in on me to-night," said the mayor.

He took down the wooden bar and lifted the latch, and when the door swung open, he stood there palsied.

Not so the visitor, whose face was unseen in the failing light.

"A late caller, Mr. Mayor. Looked in on my way from Deal to hear any news by the carrier to-day. You——"

The mayor bent forward in an agony of whispering.

"No, no, Mr. Mayor! You don't shut your door on me. Who is the enemy? Who is he? I'll see the man."

He pushed his way into the room.

"Do you mean Squire Godwyn? No, you cannot mean him. Who is this other?"

He was in front of Singleton now.

"I hear you have business with me. My name is Valentine Hardres."

"I am Captain Singleton, of His Majesty's Seventh Regiment, at your service."

"The mayor says you wish for me. What do you require?"

"The King commands your presence in London, Sir Valentine Hardres."

"Commands me to London—the King!" The baronet tried to gather himself. "Is this Sir Edward Hales? What is your purpose—would you enforce me?"

"I hold the King's warrant."

"You'd take me prisoner?"

"I fear that is the word."

Hardres backed nimbly to the door, but Singleton was before him blocking the way and his sword was in his hand.

"For Heaven's sake!" cried the mayor.

Godwyn, unsteady on his feet, stumbled to Singleton's side.

"I have my orders," said the soldier to Hardres. "Advance no further!"

The inebriated squire had been turning a glassy eye from one to the other during the exchanges, and could no longer hold himself.

"Take the traitor! Take the traitor!"

He shook his finger first at Hardres then at Singleton; he was very muddled.

"I'll help you; I'll help you!" he cried out, and with a sudden spring he threw himself, not on Hardres, but on Singleton, whose sword-arm he encircled with a drunken strength. Singleton, watching Hardres and unprepared, was over-balanced and went with a crash to the floor. He struggled but Harry Godwyn clung to him.

"I have him!" shouted the squire. "He'll not slip us."

"Madman!" roared Singleton. "Let me up! you have the wrong man!"

For reply Godwyn hugged his victim closer.

"You can't deceive me," he shouted; "I know you!"

Singleton's sword had dropped from his grasp and he was amazed that he should not be able to master his gibbering assailant. A minute of ineffectual twisting and writhing and then, as Singleton lay on his back, Godwyn peered into his face.

"You're not Hardres!" he said.

"Hardres! You sot, you villain, you limb of hell—you've let him get away."

As Singleton jerked himself to his hips, Godwyn was serious and deliberate.

"You've deceived me; you're not Hardres." He staggered to his feet seizing Singleton's sword from the floor as he did so. "You're not Hardres," he repeated.

"Grave error!" He shook his hand ludicrously. "Your fault, you deceived me. Who are you?"

"Give me my sword. I'll teach you who and what I am!"

"Come and take it." The squire leered at him. "I don't trust you—you deceived me!"

"I've never known him like it before," said the mayor distractedly.

"The pestilent lunatic! He'll go behind prison bars for this. I'm to 'The Bell.' Give him more wine, and get my sword."

He snatched hat and cloak and dashed from the door across the market-place.

When he had gone the mayor stood regarding Harry Godwyn, who had lost his vinous instability, and was bending the blade in his hand with obvious admiration for its temper.

"Send him his pig-sticker," he said extending the hilt to the mayor.

"'Tis strange behaviour, squire, for you!"

"Do you know, Mr. Sackett, I like your wine."

"You'll have no more, squire, when visitors are here."

"Yet 'tis good wine," said Godwyn; "it made me see double."

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PEEWIT'S CALL

MISGIVINGS that his artifice might have been in vain, that Singleton at midnight or before would be in force at Woodnesborough Hall—in dangerous temper, too—could not separate Harry Godwyn from satisfaction, titillation. A light-hearted adventure, and without a thought of consequences, and yet by Fortune's whim quite certainly a turning-point whatever should befall Sir Valentine. He had struck a blow, had taken sides, and he was warm that one brief hour had forced a door kept barred against him these many months. That there should be a touch of danger was but added savour.

He rode to Ash without that sense of loneliness which often lay upon his spirits when he approached the home, so live, so complete a world in far-off days, and more recently with but his father and himself a centre still for home-like ties and anxieties, with its hot-tempered, careless, generous master. Harry Godwyn loved Brook House, its meadows, the dark loam of its fields, every barn and cart house, yet there were hours, especially after nightfall, when memories stole upon him and it was nothing but a shell.

To-night as he made the bending way from the Sandwich road familiar trees came to him from the gloom like old friends, and had the little whisperings he remembered as a boy when his mother was alive. The grass-

hoppers chirruped away in an unending chorus: how often he had sought for the invisible creatures to take some home indoors with him. The fragrance of a clover field in bloom flowed over the road, and reminded him of the summer night when he and his mother and young brother Tom went out carrying lanterns to look at the newly-born calf of the favourite "Charlotte," whose crumpled horns so belied her gentle nature. He might have been back in the years—with lights in the windows of Brook House to greet him, his father in the hall frowning over accounts with Tomlyn, talking with gusto about the colts, damning or praising neighbours, singing the snatch of an old Cavalier song, and his mother at her spinning wheel, very soft and very busy through sunshine and through storm.

Harry Godwyn shook himself from dreaming; Brook House when he reached it would be dark and empty, save for the kitchen, with Tomlyn and Deborah drowsing in their chairs, and the white carcass of a pig killed and scalded that day hanging from a beam to keep them company.

He turned by the thatched cottages at the corner and with the avenue in front of him was startled, and unconsciously pulled his horse to a stand. Had he conjured ghosts from out of space? Brook House was lighted—with many candles in the big room facing the garden, the glint of a cheerful fire showing through the windows of the bedroom overhead, a light in the lantern hung outside the door, another lantern moving fitfully between the stable buildings. The place was alive.

Tomlyn was in the porch to meet his master.

"Visitors, Tomlyn?"

"Mr. Cornwallis from London. Come an hour ago. I've just been out seeing to his nag."

"First time for years, and I'm not home. Here, take this rein."

"He's just as he always was," said Tomlyn, as his master hurried through the open doorway.

In the south-east room where the candles were, Mr. Cornwallis rose to receive the squire—a heavy man of sixty odd, with black hair, kindly eyes and a large firm mouth. His voice was slow and deep with a musical timbre in it.

"Ah, Harry. No more flesh on you, I see."

"Mr. Cornwallis! Of all good surprises!"

For a full half-minute the squire was shaking the lawyer's hand, and those who said Harry Godwyn had no enthusiasm would not have known him.

"To come to an empty house—no one to meet you. Why no word?"

"Took what you said, Harry,—to come when I could, with word or without it. On my way to Dover. I'm asking a bed for to-night."

"More than one night, I hope. Zooks, I'm glad to see you."

The squire pulled the bell-rope by the side of the fireplace to bring in Deborah Gann, with curly hair snowy white as her apron.

"The best bedroom for Mr. Cornwallis, Deborah."

"All ready, Master Harry."

"Did you give our guest any supper?"

"As if she wouldn't," said Cornwallis. "Venison pasty, cold beef, fried potatoes and a quart of your old ale."

"I'd have been here two hours ago or more, but was held at the Mayor's house. All's well, Deborah; Mr. Cornwallis has been in safe hands."

He drew up a chair.

"Providence has dropped you here to-night. I'm just from an excitement. You remember Sir Valentine Hardres?"

"I've heard your father speak of him years agone—none too cordially either. He put himself high, so your father used to say."

"Hardres was the gentleman here—a deadly offence to father. He doesn't like me. All the same, I'm disturbed by an attempt on him to-night. A captain with some troopers to arrest him. I had a small part in the matter."

The lawyer listened with attention and at the end he said, "What made you strike in, Harry?"

"I rather like his daughter's straight nose."

"Nought else?"

"No other reason at all."

Cornwallis grunted.

"An old fool making trouble for himself." He smiled. "I hope there's not a young fool, too."

"I'm no political."

"There are other kinds of folly."

The smile dropped from him.

"You say you're no political, Harry?"

"I've too much else to think of."

"Harry, I've to tell you why I'm here to-night; it's about yourself."

"About me!"

"A preface first: You know as a young man I fought with your father for King Charles. You've heard of our campaigns."

"No chance of forgetting them when you two were together."

"Much has changed in forty years, this last three years too. A bad three years, Harry."

"None can shut their eyes to it."

The lawyer thrust a clenched fist into his open palm.

"I am no zealot—too old and seared—but men as old as me and older, as well as young men as keen as I am for a King, have their minds made up. You'll have heard some whisper?"

"I've heard a deal of shouting," said Harry.

"James has shed his best and wisest. Herbert has gone to Holland—dressed as a common sailor to get across unknown. He carries a message—as important a message as ever went out of this country."

Cornwallis fell back in his chair and sat with his chin in his hand looking at the squire.

"Affairs have reached that pitch?" said Harry Godwyn.

"Tories, Whigs and Nonconformists are massed against the King; they'll have no Catholic on the Throne of England. James has round him Catholic friends. A thousand petty plotters are at work on both sides. Harry, how often do you go to London?"

"Once a month, once in six weeks, perhaps."

"Will you answer me this? Have you had any lot or part in London with those on one side or the other?"

"I? I'm a farmer. Heavens, man, what have I to do in politics? I've told you."

"The other day, Harry, I was dining with my friend, Lord Devonshire. He is the head and front of the Presbyterian side. He had a list of a score of people, most of them insignificant though dangerous enough, who were spies or helpers in the other camp. I glanced down the list. Among the names was that of Harry Godwyn, the squire of Ash in Kent."

"My God!"

"Now you know why I was asking about your visits

to London and why I've come round by way of Dover to go to Holland."

"I know naught of it," cried the squire. "How could I? If the push comes I'm on your side."

The lawyer blew out a great long breath.

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Cornwallis, you believed that name was mine?"

"Wait for the end of the story. I was disturbed—I'm deep in this affair, you must know. I got hold of Monson, one of Devonshire's hangers-on who provided the list, and he took me to Locket's one night, Locket's tavern at Charing Cross—and gave me a glimpse of this man who called himself Harry Godwyn. By all that's true, Harry, I came out of that place nigh broken-hearted. I could have sworn it was you."

The squire stood up with horror on his face.

"I thought 'twould jump you," said Cornwallis. "I told myself I was mistaken. Yet 'twas your image."

"There is no mystery," said the squire.

"Eh!"

The two men looked at each other in silence.

"I thought he was killed in the wars abroad," said Cornwallis at length.

"Everybody thought so; it was best."

The lawyer whistled softly to himself.

"It must come out now," said the squire. "The reason my brother Tom fled from home and went off soldiering in France with the Scottish regiment was because he had stolen twenty guineas from my father. You didn't know that."

"That's what killed your mother."

"She was drooping. Tom's flight was the breaking-point. He was only seventeen. She didn't see him again. She had been dead six months before Tom

was back in London sending me secret messages, and I had to go and see him and give him some money. He couldn't face father. How he lived between whiles I know not. I missed him for a couple of years, and he appeared again last autumn."

"So you've been to London lately with money for him?"

"With small thanks."

"Harry, your path is clear."

"He calls some part of this farm his, by rights if not by law."

"I drew your father's will. Every acre and every stick and stone belongs to you. There's more than money in this affair. You have no choice."

Cornwallis's face was set hard.

"He's your brother, but there's a breaking-point."

"I've not reached the breaking-point yet."

"Harry, don't you bring yourself to ruin for such as he."

"You don't know my brother. You don't know my suspicions. I haven't been able to tell them even to you. I'll have no Godwyn a confessed highwayman if I can help it."

"If highwayman he is, or means to be, nought that you can do will stop him. I would not advise you wrongly, boy. He'll suck your blood and then he'll sell you."

"I don't think he's as bad as that. Also, I've been provoking with him——"

"Provoking!" scoffed Cornwallis.

"I've given him money, but also hurtful words."

"I'm the one who should deal with your brother Tom."

"My mother wouldn't have that Tom was wicked. I came home when she was going. She couldn't talk to

my father about Tom. She talked to me about him every day—there were only a few days. I promised to look after him."

Cornwallis walked up and down the room in thought, and after a while he said, "When I return from Holland we'll send this young scoundrel abroad. We'll give him something, settle something on him."

"The farm this year has made its first profit, just about one hundred pounds. He has had sixty of them."

"You needn't worry about the money."

"No, I'll not agree to that, Mr. Cornwallis."

"I'm a rich man, Harry. A fine friend I should be!"

"I have to find a way out of this by myself."

The squire rang the bell for Tomlyn. "Get some tobacco and clean pipes and a jar of the old Schnappes, and then you can snuff the candles."

"I shall come back to this matter sometime," said Cornwallis.

"I'll keep nothing from you."

"I'll see you don't. A wilful man are you, Harry." He pursed his lips. "Now you'll be wanting to hear of London, and all this affair. 'Twill be useful to you."

"Aye; I'd like to ask some questions."

In a cloud of tobacco smoke Harry listened to a description of the drama in the framing—the recklessness of the King, his fervour for the Catholics, the machinations of Sunderland and Godolphin, the desperate intention of Devonshire and his followers, the doubt about Churchill and other soldiers, the disaffection among some of the regiments, the methodical preparations across the water by the Prince who was to be at once the invader and the preserver. Cornwallis told of the people at Whitehall, gallants and princesses, priests,

wits and concubines; he had an acid word for most of them. Twice Harry stopped him for more detail; the first time about that picturesque figure Lord Dover, better known by the name of Harry Jermyn, and the second time about the King's old favourite, the Countess of Dorchester. On both he was copiously informed. "Your two acquaintances at court!" said Cornwallis. "Bold man!"

"I can at least claim to have spoken to Lord Dover, though 'twas in public. He, like the Countess, wouldn't know me if he met me face to face to-morrow."

"She had better reason to remember you."

Harry laughed. "Like enough she thought I was a rival robber."

They fell to recalling the incident. It was in his second year in London when he was coming one evening from the theatre in Drury Lane. The people had thinned out, and an elegantly-dressed lady, who had apparently lost her chair, was walking down an alley way towards the Strand, attended only by a link boy. Three men who had been waiting for such a victim sprang at her from a doorway, tried to seize her. The frightened link boy scrambled to the other side of the alley. Harry, a dozen yards behind, ran up, sent one man spinning with a blow on the neck, and whipped out his sword as the other two turned on him. The fight was over in a minute. One ruffian, pricked in the wrist, dropped his weapon and ran, the other, with a thrust through the shoulder, staggered back and collapsed in a doorway.

"Bravo! Master Quicksword," cried the lady, and clapped her hands. "Come, take me to a coach."

"By your leave, I'll see I haven't killed the fellow," said Harry.

"La! why such a fuss? But as you will. For me, I hate the sight of carrion. I'm to the Strand. Catherine Sedley, that's my name: remember it."

Before she went she made the trembling boy hold up the light so that she might see her rescuer's face. "Ask for me at Whitehall." She turned with a wave of the hand and swept on her way.

"You learned the use of a sword better than the statutes, Harry," said Cornwallis.

"I've another kind of adventure now. I can't get Tom out of my head, Mr. Cornwallis."

"I've been thinking of him, too, while we talked. What was that?"

The soughing of the wind among the trees and shrubs outside had been broken by the wailing cry of a peewit. It sank away to rise again, long drawn and piercing.

"A green plover," said Harry. "They come up over the marshes between here and the sea."

"An eerie sound by night," said Cornwallis. "I don't think I should like to live in the country—and, Harry, you can't always live in the country. Have you no ambition? You were not meant to remain a turnip. You were at Cambridge, you spent two years with me in London, you——"

Again came that long-drawn call, almost a scream.

"Pee-ee-weet! Pee-ee-weet!"

Cornwallis started, and the squire walked to the window, and peered out between the curtains into the darkness.

"I should hate to be wakened from sleep by your plover," said the lawyer. "Like an evil spirit calling."

Harry Godwyn turned from the window to walk back across the room to his friend, and then the call of the peewit came for the third time. The squire stopped

dead, and one less keen than Cornwallis might have read his indecision, his perturbation. He lifted his eyes to meet the steady scrutiny of the lawyer.

"Whose signal is it, Harry?"

"That's brother Tom, Mr. Cornwallis."

CHAPTER NINE

TOM GODWYN'S CHALLENGE

AT the gateway of the avenue the squire stopped and tried to pierce the denseness of the group of trees and undergrowth at the triangle which formed the junction of three lanes. He whistled low and long; an answering whistle came from the darkness, and, from the obscurity of a hazel thicket, a man led forth a horse.

"I supposed you had a guest; candles to waste to-night."

"Why are you here?"

"Aye, Harry, I am a pesterer. Is there anything to eat in the house?"

"Tie your horse to the gatepost," said the squire.

They walked in silence through the trees till the house and the buildings round it and the ricks at the back showed their dim outlines.

"Looks just the same," said Tom Godwyn.

"Just the same."

When they were inside the hall Harry took a light to the kitchen while Tom Godwyn turned with a look towards the broad stair-rail where he had often slid as a boy. He walked over to the fireplace and touched with his foot the andiron; he had once fallen on to it from the chimney seat and cut his face. The little wooden stool on which he sat while his mother taught him letters from the horn-book was still in its place under the table,

the top of it polished and smooth as of old. The tall clock in its dull oaken case stood near the door, ticking out the seconds, almost the first distinct sound he remembered from the time that he could talk. He had an early beating from his father, when he pulled the leaden weights to wind the clock in mid-week.

Harry Godwyn came in with an armful of dishes and placed on the table cold beef, bread, butter and cheese.

"Get a chair," he said, and he took a jug from the dresser to go for some beer.

Tom Godwyn ate and drank with a relish, and when he had finished said, "I've come down from London to see you."

"It's not just chance you're here to-night?"

"It might easily have been last night or to-morrow. Why?"

"You had no other errand?"

"What other errand should I have?"

"They went to Sandwich to take Hardres this evening. Your coming seemed a conjunction. What is it you want?"

"Hardres, eh? I'm not surprised. I had a hint of it."

He got up from his chair, and tramped the length of the room, with the spurs on his riding boots clinking.

The brothers were remarkably alike—the same blue eyes with a glint in them, the same tawny hair, the same upward twitch to the corners of the mouth. Tom was a trifle heavier in the shoulders, the large Godwyn nose was increased a size, otherwise they were of a mould. The open-air complexion of the squire with clean skin stretched tight over cheek-bones was matched in his brother. Dissipation and a hard life had left no mark on Tom Godwyn as yet.

He came to a stop in the middle of the room and threw up his head.

"I'm going to give you a chance to get rid of me. I've been thinking a lot this last day or so. You're sore because I come to you for money."

"Brook House is not a gold-mine."

"Oh, drop the sermon business," cried the younger man, with sudden fire.

"I'm no such fool as to give you sermons. What is it you wish of me?"

"To listen about yourself. I'm here to talk."

"Say on."

The squire leaned against the wall by the fire-place, resigned and moody.

"Father clouted me and bullied me. I was only a boy. He made my life a hell. I ran off with that money to spite him as much as anything else. Mother was my only friend. When I came back from France she was dead. The pittances you brought me in London were just enough to keep me from starvation. What was I to do, tell me that?"

He paused and for a moment or two the slow, loud ticking of the big clock was the only sound.

"For all his cruelty I knew father planned that what he left should be shared between us. I couldn't wait for it, and while he was alive he was a beast to me. I wasn't righteous like you—who claims it? I've done good soldiering—ask Macdonald. I dived deep. I found a companion or two—rascals you'd call them. They taught me ways—and I'm thankful—thankful, I tell you."

"I tried to help you."

"You scorned and hated me—I knew it. Then I heard that father had left you everything!"

Tom Godwyn laughed coarsely.

"You and your charity, Harry. Yes, charity with sermons thrown in."

He suddenly was fierce again.

"Was I to be particular after that?"

"There is one element in your misfortunes you forget—yourself."

"Oh, I had a temper—was my inheritance to be lost because I had a temper? You secured my part—the whole. You have it now. You give me condescension. Harry, I reckon I hate you as much as you hate me."

"What's behind all this?"

"You'll never believe it. I'm very near a penitent—no not quite that—a penitent qualified. Look not so scared; I've taken no religious vows. Moreover, the disposition may pass. While it's on me I'll tell it. That's why I've come from London. Put on your pious look. I've sold you."

"I've already heard my name's on a list of useful persons."

"You've heard that! When did you hear it? Cornwallis! I saw the old fox in the yard of 'The Fleur-de-lis' at Canterbury."

"I suppose my name was worth something! What now?"

"That's only the beginning—not likely to hurt you much. Curse it, Harry, you deserve it all."

"What else have you done?"

"I'll tell you what I've done," burst out Tom Godwyn. "I've sold your reputation—blasted you—and others also—all for a hundred guineas, eighty yet to come."

He panted with the effort of confessing it.

"Go on," said the squire in high-pitched voice.

"That's not the finish or I would not be here. I'm a villain at heart, black to the core!—biting the hand that fed me!—I can tell what you're thinking. You're only partly right. I suppose you'd not believe that I could have a qualm? Listen then to this, I'm prepared to throw the whole thing over. I'm ready to write anything you like and sign, but you must help me. I'll have to get away abroad."

"What's this precious plot of yours?"

"Don't take the high hand with me, Harry."

"I'm frightened for you, not for myself."

"Harry, as sure as there's a heaven above us, what I'm telling you is right. I've got you in the pit."

"How do you wish me to help you? I have no money."

"You can get it. I've always counted half this place as mine."

"Are you asking me to share?"

"I've eighty guineas to be paid to me, a promise of rich work to follow. I want to flee this country. I promise you shall never see me more or hear my name. You can denounce me, disown me if you like. Raise two hundred guineas and let me go. I'll give you a quittance for all."

"Two hundred guineas!"

"The property is worth a thousand at the least."

"Tom Godwyn, you're mad. I'd not mortgage this place——"

"Not to save yourself from ruin?"

"I'm in no danger of ruin whatever you may do."

"You're wrong and you'll soon know it. What of me? Aren't you going to clear yourself with me. I'm asking less than what's my right."

"Two hundred guineas!"

Harry Godwyn's forehead was wrinkled in angry thought; his brother, with arms akimbo, stood watching him.

"'Tis mine—and more, too. You'll have good riddance of me."

"I'll help you—but in my own way, not yours."

"Your way! What's your way, pray?"

"I've listened to you. I've known you from a boy. You're my brother. I'll see you go to hell before I mortgage Brook House to give you two hundred guineas. This is what I'll do. Cut loose from all that holds you. Come and live here and work here. I'll give you a half of all we make in earning and some day 'twill be considerable. You're young. I'll wipe out what's gone."

Amazement not indignation was in Tom Godwyn's first blank stare.

"So that's your way." His face was clouded now.

"I'll make it as easy as I can."

"Easy!" The word might have been an oath.

"Don't ride me," said the squire.

"To herd your cattle, trim your hedges, sweat on your midden, rise at five, to bed at nine with small beer for supper. Your humble servant with the wages of a ploughman. That's your help!"

"You've heard all I've to say."

"You'll not lift me out?"

"I've said my last word on it."

"You have, have you?—Then hear my last word. I'll make the name of Godwyn stink and you stink with it. I have given you a chance. This is no home of mine. I would that Brook House was burned and you inside it. My worst enemy—you always were."

He was shouting in his fury. He reached for his hat

lying on a chair. The squire took up a candle, went through the hall to the outer door and pulled it open.

Just beyond the threshold Tom Godwyn turned and confronted him.

"Esau!"

"Go to the devil," said the squire.

He shut the door and put up the big wooden bar in the sockets behind it and from outside came the sound on the gravel of Tom Godwyn striding off down the avenue.

Harry Godwyn did not go to bed, and back in the south-east room he dropped into a chair, and lit a pipe and tried to smoke. The pipe went out and he put it down on the table.

To make the name of Godwyn stink: it might so happen. An easy piece of work for Captain Night of the Uxbridge Road, and at what greater risk than heretofore—for he who now was Captain Godwyn with transferred allegiance from stable lads and serving wenches? A coward's blow! Yet Tom Godwyn was no coward, he reflected, naught but a vengeful raging youth, crazed with disappointment. Even so, he might go laughing to Tyburn Tree.

Harry Godwyn recalled Tom as a boy; a whistling, mischievous imp, who drove the calves round the yard with a stick to see them run, fell into the freshet with new clothes on, took his father's pistol to pieces to see how it worked. He had always to be watched. His father thrashed him often, and his mother comforted him afterwards in secret and pressed him close to her skirts. Since then—these many years, a thief, a bravo—what besides?

Harry's thought went to the devilment revealed that night, surely a drunken freak, the branding in

ignominy one who, however noxious to him, was his blood-link, head of the family, too. A treachery, a malice for which, if meant, there ne'er could be forgiveness. Drink the secret—what other answer could there be? But for the story of Cornwallis, so apt to hand, Tom's avowal might well have been but talented persuasion for bestowal of two hundred guineas. His very infamy became an instrument. A penitent! If ever impulse called for penitence, Tom had good reason for his journey down to Ash. A strange being Tom Godwyn: had he not spoken of a qualm!

Harry Godwyn sank low in his chair and lay back with his gaze on the blackened beams which crossed the ceiling above him. An hour went by—two hours. The birds began to twitter in the garden outside. A waking cock crowed loudly. Grey morning was filtering in through the crevices of the curtains at the window when the squire rose to his feet, yawned and stretched himself, and had an unexpected thought of breakfast.

He had made up his mind. The carting of the late hay would be finished in a day of two, and then he would go and see Jeffery Sackett at Sandwich. Sackett would let him have two hundred guineas on the security of Brook House and the farm.

CHAPTER TEN

NEW ASPECTS OF THE SQUIRE

TOM GODWYN went forth from Brook House, a changed man, with resolution in him, and a burning heart. If he had a scruple it was gone, and in its place was a fixed bitterness and vengefulness, quick darting plans, for in Tom Godwyn, as in others of his name, rage and hatred did not exhaust themselves in words. His brother—why in the sight of Heaven! A devil! An enemy, now as he would always be. Holding himself high—a dispossessor! He little knew, the fool, how soon he could be wrecked. Captain Night, highwayman, ceased existence from that hour. The Uxbridge road! Had Harry Godwyn forgotten the Dover road in Kent?

By Barham crossroads, Tom Godwyn first heard the sound of riders at the trot coming from the south. He swung his horse round and cantered along the grass by the roadside to where the beeches joined overhead and made a shadowy archway a hundred yards in length. He pulled his horse back to the undergrowth between the tree trunks and sat with his gaze along the roadway to spy the travellers—he wished to choose a proper quarry, no lads on a poaching expedition, or farm hands on their way to early market.

The clouds had lifted, and at fifty yards away he was able to discern that they were man and woman, well mounted too. Here were no farm hands. When they

were at the entrance to the trees Tom Godwyn recognised them, and his heart gave a bound.

"Stand."

He rode out from the bushes with pistol extended.

The breath went from Sir Valentine Hardres at the first surprise of it.

"What?"

"Keep your hands up. Touch not your holsters or you're a dead man."

"Who are you?"

"Don't back your horse. I shoot quick."

"Give him what you've got, father," cried the frightened Edith.

"Gallows bird," shouted Sir Valentine, even while he had the prudence to check the backward movement of his horse.

A laugh was the answer as the young man spurred near them.

"Don't hurt my father. He'll give you his money. I have two guineas here."

"Mistress, I am not here for money but for something far more precious."

A thrill went through her at his voice.

"What's your aim?"

"Hold your reins well up, I'll take no chances," said Tom Godwyn. He shifted his pistol from his right hand to his left and urged his horse towards that of the girl.

"I had thought to rob you, 'tis few I have spared, and yet there are occasions. Worthy sir, and mistress, I need more than money." The withers of his horse came in contact with that of the girl.

"Take care, Edith," cried Hardres.

Tom Godwyn suddenly leaned forward, threw a

strong arm round her shoulders, pulled her to him and kissed her, not upon the lips,—she prevented that,—but upon the cheek. The horses were in a jostle together, Edith calling her father to help her, Hardres hazy as to the nature of the assault, and, then with a premeditated quickness, Tom Godwyn had swung his horse clear.

"What happened, Edith?"

"He kissed me."

"Beauty's payment."

The young man, with his horse gathering speed, had turned to shout the words, and he laughed very merrily.

"You hound, you knave," cried Hardres, and he tugged his pistol from his holster. Tom Godwyn, galloping hard now and bending low upon his saddle, heard the crack of the shot. He laughed again as he disappeared under the darkness of the trees far ahead.

"He must have waited for us," said Hardres.

"But how was he to know we should come this way?" Edith was trembling.

"You saw his face?"

"I thought I did but it was dark, I couldn't be sure."

"Edith, that couldn't possibly have been Harry Godwyn?"

"No, no," she cried hastily. "It wasn't the squire. How could it have been?"

* * * * * *

Concern was behind the cordiality of Lord Dover when he entered the parlour of John Richardson, the linen-draper, of Knightrider Street but three hours after the arrival of Sir Valentine Hardres and his daughter. He had come in unannounced—a shop apprentice was

little hindrance to Lord Dover—and Sir Valentine amazed to be so soon discovered was not without a touch of consternation.

"How did you know——?"

"Good fortune and good servants, Sir Valentine, urgency alone has brought me. My haste is that of a friend."

"You can help us?" cried Edith.

"It is my purpose."

"You'll pardon me. I'm still marvelling," said Hardres.

"I was at my home in Hertfordshire when the order for your seizure was made. I learned of it two days since, spoke to the King, and had some harsh words for my pains. Affairs go awry with him and he is fretted. He rests on Hales and others."

"How did you find our whereabouts?"

"I feared you must come under escort. I'd plans if so't should be for facing Hales within the hour, other plans too,—the King again. Hales is Constable of the Tower, you'll know. I had London Bridge watched. My men followed you here. You slipped away? You had word of the matter?"

"No, I broke free. They sent soldiers from Canterbury to seize me."

"But why to London, Sir Valentine?"

"Tell me a safer place. I'm here to burst the bubble. Am I a cutpurse to be harried?"

"'Tis best to avoid a storm. A storm blows out."

"I come to seek friends—the first is Sergeant Fancourt of the Temple."

"Fancourt! A weak reed, I fear. Fancourt looks for one of the vacant seats on the King's Bench."

"He's an honest man."

"A lawyer—passing honest I do not doubt—but he looks for a seat on the King's Bench! A preoccupation to say no more."

"There's Sir Edward Halford."

"Halford has weight at the Leicester quarter sessions; it does not extend to Whitehall. Sir Valentine, if you have others on your list I beg you to forget them. I do myself the honour to make you a proposal. I can give you safety for a week or more—'tis all that's needed. I put my poor house near St. James' at the disposal of yourself and Mistress Hardres forthwith."

"Oh," gasped Edith.

Hardres stood wide-eyed; one thought chased another in his astonishment.

"But you are at the court, my lord."

Dover smiled.

"Harry Jermyn can be trusted to protect himself even while he serves his friends."

"I am at a loss, Lord Dover. Why should you take this embarrassment on you? Not but what I'm grateful for a friendly offer. I'm a stranger; you scarce know me."

"I've known men less to whom I've said good morrow for a score of years. Come, Sir Valentine, hesitate not. I'll have great pleasure from this small service."

"Why should you be thus burdened? I'm here to smash some silly lies. A trifle surely—one day, two days perhaps. Rubbishy tittle-tattle—it can be no more."

"They have strong written evidence against you."

"Evidence of what, in Heaven's name?"

"You are the head and front of disloyalty at Sandwich."

"Nonsense like that!"

"You sheltered Last, a nonconformist minister who has raved against the King at Maidstone."

"He came to the house hungry and footsore. I wouldn't turn away a hungry dog."

"You opposed Dering, the King's nominee for Parliament at the accession, you are an old Cromwellian, you incited the local council to refuse congratulations on the birth of the Prince—much else—'tis all written and sworn to."

"Rags and shreds! Worse can be said of some of His Majesty's Council."

"True, yet you may be a victim."

"Who has given this wicked testimony?" asked Edith.

"The name escapes me. You may recall it. He is a neighbour of yours in Kent—bears you ill-will that's plain. To me it taints him in advance."

"A neighbour!" said Hardres, "I am friends with all my neighbours—all but one; he is no person to lay these charges."

"It came from Hales—second-hand talk—that you were almost at naked blades with the fellow's father. Revenge, of course. 'Twould not affect a judgment, I fear."

"Squire Godwyn?"

"Yes, that's the name. A malignant young man by all accounts."

Hardres took a second to recover.

"I'll probably come to you, my lord. Give me an hour or two. I wish to talk with my daughter."

"I'll send a coach for you at six."

Edith, white-faced, had to struggle for her faint word of good-bye as Dover bowed low.

"Your father will be safe," he said reassuringly.

They heard his alert decided step through the shop, heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs out in Knightrider Street, and then Edith Hardres turned to her father.

"I wonder if it can possibly be true."

"It sounds unreal for a young man of Harry Godwyn's make. He could not be so hellish. He's a farmer—little more—— Besides why should he do it?"

"Yes, why?"

"But then why should he have tried to lay hold of me as he did in Jeffery Sackett's house? It's of a-piece."

"I'm all horror, father. He's a neighbour, a decent man—though you have so much dislike of him."

Sir Valentine nodded with a reasonableness which surprised his daughter.

"There's an explanation, and I suppose it's this—he's crazed against me. He lives and sleeps with this hatred—nothing else to think of. I've heard such things."

"Do you believe it?"

"What else can be imagined? Remember, too, we had a strange adventure on the way to London."

"The highwayman was not Harry Godwyn," exclaimed Edith.

"I wish I felt as certain."

"Father, we must see the squire. At least one of us must see him."

Sir Valentine looked up.

"See him! The fellow's down at Ash, or I suppose he is. I could wring the truth from him perhaps—if I could keep my temper."

Edith's distress was not proof against a smile.

"It's not all loss that he's at Ash. Seventy miles is

not too much between you. Father, I'll go down to Kent and see Harry Godwyn."

"You! A girl like you! You can't face the villain!"

"I am not at all afraid. I'll bring back the truth."

The colour was in her face again now; her eyes were eager.

"Father, you could not go. It's dangerous to leave this house. I can make the journey without trouble. It is needful above everything to see Mr. Godwyn. There's some mistake. A word or two from him and this plot against you crashes. Far better than resting on your friends, better than resting on Lord Dover."

"I can't see he'd confess aught. Yet you might surprise him. But the ride, you can't make the ride alone!"

"Can I not! You'll give me one of your pistols. I'll ride only in the daylight."

"It might be done," said Hardres grudgingly. "I hate for you to have the risk."

Edith laughed heartily.

"Am I then but twelve years old? The roads at Woodnesborough are no safer than Kentish roads elsewhere."

Hardres patted her head. "I'll be on edge till you're back here with me again. What of Dover's invitation?"

"Tell him of my errand; he'll see the wisdom of it."

"I've a feeling I would like to stay with Richardson."

"Better not offend Lord Dover. Lose not such a friend. We may not need his help, but in mischance——"

"Ooms, girl! a long head on little shoulders. Perhaps you're right, I'll think of it. You'll leave the dapple here in Richardson's stable. He'll get you a fresh horse."

"I can reach Rochester this evening before dark."

"Rest at 'The Crown Inn' with Mistress Popham. A horse there if you need one in the morning. On to Canterbury. There you'll be at home. 'The Rose' or 'The Fountain' will let you have another mount. You'll be making speed, I know."

"I'll come back even quicker than I go."

"Sleep at home the night. You'll need the rest. I shall be all ears for Barton's story of the soldiers if they came. When will you be ready?"

"By the time the horse is at the door, or sooner."

She was as good as her word, and was waiting for her father when he came downstairs with some guineas for her tied up in a small linen bag.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SQUIRE'S ANSWER

THE carrying of the second cut of grass was nearing its end one sunny afternoon and the six acre had been denuded of all but its last line of haycocks. The rick, on the further side of the stables, was half way up the narrowing slope towards the ridge, and Tomlyn was doing the building with the same precision that he gave to the well-curved wheat ricks. The hay came to him from Jarvis, standing in a manhole, and below, in the waggon, the squire, bare-armed, with shirt open at the neck, was hoisting on his prong, at steady intervals, great bunches which in the course of months would make up half a truss.

Harry Godwyn had the farmer's satisfaction that twelve tons of good hay would soon be under thatch, but to-day he was more than usually glad of the sunshine. He was short of men on the farm and he had not yet been able to absent himself to go to Sandwich.

"What is there—two more load?" called out Tomlyn from the top of the rick.

"One more load after this, far as I can see," said the squire.

The three men paused in their work to make a view. The meadow was a quarter of a mile away on the other side of a field of wheat in stalwart ear. The waggon, by the haycocks in the meadow, was half loaded, another waggon was entering the gateway by

the elms, its great wheels in a chatter and a rumble, the tug and trace chains chinking. Young Will Ritson, by the side of the leader, whip over his shoulder, was carolling forth his one and only song.

"You're right, Tomlyn; they won't get it on one load."

The squire leaned on his prong for a minute, making excuse for a rest while Tomlyn and Jarvis straightened themselves and wiped moist foreheads with moist arms.

The air was heavy with the scent of the hay. The fallow beyond the meadow shimmered with the heat, and the oats grey and green, in the three acre on the left, moved heavy heads languidly. A late lark was in ecstasy out of sight high overhead. Will Ritson's waggon came to a standstill and his song could be heard clearly as he stood waiting for the other team with its load.

> "She quivers in Spring like the aspen tree,
> Her ankles are trim, and dimpled her chin,
> We know that the cows can't resist her.
> She hasn't a swain, they all try in vain;
> Devil a one of them's kissed her.
> Milking maid say you're for me."

A restive trace horse interrupted Ritson and he hurried forward with a crack of his whip. "Mather woot. Steady, my gal." He stood with his hand on the leading rein.

> "She hasn't a swain, they all try in vain;
> And devil a one of them's kissed her."

Ritson stopped his singing to disentangle the mare's topknot.

"Squire, who's this a-coming up the avenue!"

Tomlyn at the top of the rick stood with his hand shading his eyes.

Harry Godwyn mounted the rail of the waggon to get a sight of the visitor.

"Can't be Mistress Hardres," said Tomlyn.

Harry Godwyn jumped from the waggon to the ground.

"Get Ferrier and Bretts to help when they come in with the last load," he said as he set off across the rick-yard.

She smiled a greeting, or tried to, as she rode up, but he saw well enough the trouble in her, and made a quick guess that Sir Valentine was in difficulty, if no worse.

"This is an honour, Mistress Hardres."

He put out his hand, as an alighting stone for her, and as she stepped on it she thought how strong he was.

"I have ridden a long way to see you."

"Your father——"

"My father is beset in London."

"London! let me take you indoors. I'll see to your horse. Deborah is in the house."

"I cannot rest a moment till I have spoken my mission."

Her hood was pushed back a little from her forehead, a loose ringlet was over her ear.

"I can explain about Sandwich," said the squire.

"A confused occasion so I judged it. An item now. Would that all else should end as happily."

Fear rose in him; it had been latent from the time he jumped down from the waggon.

"You were away before the soldiers reached Woodnesborough?"

"We fled to London. Father intended to stir his friends. We rested at the home of Mr. Richardson, the linen-draper in Knightrider Street, who was in my father's troop under Cromwell. Lord Dover came to see us."

"That man."

"He is our good friend. He wishes us to stay at his home."

"Lord Dover is no man to be trusted."

"He gave us the news which brings me down to you. There is a plot to ruin father."

"A plot!"

"A terrible, wicked plot." She was speaking impetuously now. "An informer is at work, worse than an informer. They will find him at your word, your word, Mr. Godwyn. That's what I have come for. Father agreed that I should see you. I have never wished evil to anyone before."

"What's this tale of Lord Dover?"

"The testimony against my father is in a statement signed by one who calls himself 'Harry Godwyn, Squire of Ash'!"

She stood tremulous at what must break from him.

"My name!" he said at length.

"Yes, your name. Someone is using it. Lord Dover takes you as the informer. He does not know you."

"He does not know me," muttered the squire. All the life had gone out of him.

"The quarrel between Brook House and the Hall has been seized on. The vileness, Mr. Godwyn!"

"Have you heard the charges against your father?"

Edith Hardres went through the list. "Trifles made large, and joined together. Some sheer lies too. Did the miscreant think you would be silent? He faced great hazards. Was it for money, not money surely!"

"He'll have his reward," said the squire indistinctly.

"It has been a monstrous dream, all this, till I could see you. You'll break the story. You'll come to London."

"Mistress Hardres, I must disappoint you." He had almost to shout the words to get them out.

She stared at him dumbly, the world about her ears.

"The miscreant you speak of stands before you."

Slowly understanding came to her. "You wrote those things," she said in a faint voice.

He had a spasm of bravado.

"Your father has always sought out ways to injure Brook House. Nothing but insults have ever come from him. Didn't he strike me in the face at Wingham?"

"But this testimony, these statements." She spoke without anger, in a wondering, despairing way.

Perspiration was in big drops on the squire's forehead.

"Drink has been a curse to all our family."

She hardly heard him. "I can't believe it, I can't believe it."

"I'll try to make repair."

"Repair!"

"They got me when I was drunk one day. Read things over to me and I agreed with all of them. 'Twas just my drunken habit to deride your father; it meant nothing, I signed it not knowing. Declared I hoped it would ruin him. I wouldn't have done it sober. I hoped afterwards it was a kind of joke."

"You did this! Where did you do it?"

"Where? Where was it? At 'The Rose' in Canterbury. I'll make repair. I'll go to London. I'll tell them I was drunk."

"They'll not believe it. They have your name."

"I'll wipe out what I said. I'll come to London."

"I do not know what you should do, but I must go back and tell my father."

As she turned to her horse he put out his hand to help her, and she drew clear of him like a bruised and frightened animal. He swung round then and did not wait to see her mount. On his way up the avenue to the house he heard her riding away to the road behind him.

He went to the kitchen for a towel and out in the yard at the pump he sluiced his head and shoulders with the cold water. He dried himself vigorously and called to Tomlyn on the top of the rick.

"It was Mistress Hardres, squire?" said the steward as he crossed the yard.

"Tom has put his head in a rope."

"This Hardres business I reckon."

"I start for London to-day. See the roan gelding is ready for me after dinner. Tell Deborah to put a few things in the saddle bag. Give the gelding a sieve of oats at once. Then come to me."

He was on the way to the house by the time he had finished speaking. In the hall he hesitated, then crossed to the cupboard in the chimney recess and drew forth two pistols. He took them to the kitchen and sought around for a feather and a bottle of oil. When his task was finished he laid the pistols by the side of a pile of plates on the dresser and reached up on to a shelf for an apple. He took the apple back into the hall and

suspended it by a piece of string four feet long to a nail on a rafter. Tomlyn came in while he was tying up the string.

"Long since you tried that, Master Harry."

"Get my sword," said Harry Godwyn.

Tomlyn went upstairs and returned with a slender weapon.

"The latest and best when I bought it," said the squire lightly, as he took the blade. "A piece of English work just as good as they can make in France or Spain."

He made some passes with it. "Wrist stiff," he said. "Set it going, Tomlyn."

Tomlyn gave the apple a push and it spun round rapidly in a circle two feet in diameter. Like lightning Harry lunged at it, missing it; lunged again and missed again by the fraction of an inch. It was only after two minutes' effort that he was able to transfix it.

"Bad," he said. "In the old days I could do it every thrust."

"What are ye thinking of, squire?" asked Tomlyn anxiously.

"A man in London to try a bout with. I wish I had better practice."

"Ye'll take care, squire. Do I know the man?"

"You've heard of him—Harry Jermyn, Lord Dover."

"Harry Jermyn! Don't do it, boy, don't do it. He'll kill ye."

"I don't know," said the squire; "I reckon to leave my mark on him."

An hour later the gelding with folded cloak on pommel, with packed saddle bag, and holsters furnished, was brought round by Tomlyn from the stables to the

front of the house. Harry Godwyn came down the steps adjusting the baldric which carried his sword; it was years since he had worn a sword. His brown riding coat, his high boots and wide-brimmed hat made him a different man from the farmer of the morning. Dress was but part of the change in him. His face had a gauntness, he was hard-mouthed, his eyes were dull, withal he moved as alertly as usual. Deborah behind him on the steps was wiping away a tear or two with her apron.

"Get some thatch on the hay as soon as you can," he said to Tomlyn when he was in the saddle.

He rode in the sunshine towards the road with a feeling that he might not see his home again, and he had no special sadness about it. To his left the men were busy at the rick with the last load from the meadow. The fowls ran scampering from his path. Young Ritson was bringing in the trace horse to the stables.

"She hasn't a swain, they all try in vain,
Devil a one of them's kissed her."

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SQUIRE SEEKS AN INTERVIEW

A YOUNG man of twenty-six compact with health and vigour from country labour may be thrust low, may taste despair, but presently finds, willy-nilly, the springs of spirit rising. Harry Godwyn, after a good night's rest at Faversham, rose early and went out to the empty yard of the inn to practise some passes with his sword. The rattle of his feet on the cobbles brought the stable boy to the door of the loose box.

"What be at?"

Harry Godwyn slipped his blade into its sheath and turned to survey a freckled youth with straw-coloured hair holding a bunch of litter on his prong in mid air.

"Didn't you see him?"

"See who?"

"He got away. Too quick for me."

"No one been here!"

"Rub the dirt from your eyes, boy. Give my horse a sieve of oats; I'm on the road in half an hour."

The boy fed the roan and then went into the kitchen and told Hostess Gredille that he reckoned the visitor who had stayed the night was a mad one. Mistress Gredille, busy with frizzling sausages in a pan on the fire, remarked that there were many of them in these times, and that their money was as good as other people's, and that a crazy guest was no excuse for coming into the kitchen with dirty boots.

When the straw-haired youth led out the roan for

Harry Godwyn to mount, he did not have thanks for the coin which was put in his hand, being taken up with another matter.

"You going to kill somebody?"

"I do it every day."

"Oh, ah," said the straw-haired youth.

Harry Godwyn rode off chuckling, and if the smile soon left his face—with a trifle of amazement that he could be so soon amused—he became conscious that the passage of the night had lightened his burden. All was not yet lost. What had seemed tragedy might resolve into but a quick and peppery enterprise. She had understanding in her; he relied on that.

As he rode on his way towards Rochester through groves of festooned hops, and fields of wheat nodding and whispering in the sunshine, he sorted out his aims.

Cornwallis's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields had roses in front of it, a big garden behind, and, withal, was a fit residence for a prosperous lawyer who had been drawn into politics and an association with those who might soon have a hand in government. The dining-room with its glittering chandelier, its great carved chimney-place and rich hangings was as handsome as that of many a nobleman. The library with its hundreds of calf bindings—and stores of learning within them—had drawn envious words from Narcissus Luttrell and Gilbert Burnet. Upstairs in a room lined with oak deed-boxes three clerks with their chief, old Robins, pored over documents at their desks or at the big middle table. Good horses were in the stable, good wines in the cellar. Harry Godwyn had found his two years at Cornwallis's house a very happy time and he rode up to it now with a sense of home and comfort. Robins espied him from the upper room, and was out to

the gate with a welcome before the young man was off his horse.

"The best sight short of the master, Harry. The master's all right?"

"Mid-channel by now, suffering nought but seasickness. He stayed the night with me."

The squire tied his horse to the railings, refusing the offer of an empty stall.

"You'll rest here, Harry, while you are in London."

"Nay, old friend. I've come but for a talk."

The faded genial eyes took on a lawyer's keenness.

"'Tis after what the master told you."

"That and more."

The story, with Robins' questions to lengthen it, was no brief matter. Harry kept nothing back except what Edith Hardres meant for him, and that was not long concealed from his listener. Forty-five years in Lincoln's Inn had wizened Robins' face but had not dried up his perceptions.

"The wiser course for all, Harry, is to let your brother bear his own load."

"Better that I should be a drunkard than Tom a felon. I cannot alter what I've told to Mistress Hardres, nor would I."

"You're not strong enough to save him, whatever you may do."

"I've still a little pride."

"Aye, aye." The old man rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"It might be done. Yes, it might be done."

"From here I go to take a lodging at 'The Cock Tavern' in Fleet Street where I may get word of Tom. That comes first."

" Ye're a fool, Harry."

" I'll try to see him, I tell you," said Harry almost fiercely.

" Ye'll stay to dinner here, 'tis nearly ready. Afterwards while you go to ' The Cock ' I'll be at work to find out what's occurred to Hardres. The girl's not back yet? "

" She's close upon my track for certain. I put haste into her."

" Upstairs I have one who does much for us besides scrivening. Richard Bolney till a year ago was an underclerk at the Board of Green Cloth in the Palace, discharged for a continual whispering in the presence of the august. The man's tongue is like a pendulum. He has many friends of a sort. Bolney will go forth for news. You're sure you'll not rest here, Harry? "

" I aim to be an unsavoury person. Mr. Cornwallis's house will gain nothing if I am observed to be a guest. That I should come and go is nothing."

" As you will, Harry. Fleet Street is near to us."

Dinner gave Robins scope for new explorations; he was a precise and methodical old man, and Harry Godwyn went out to his horse with a warning in his ears. " If you see your brother say nothing of your intentions."

" 'Tis his I want to talk of."

" I hope you'll not see him," said Robins.

At " The Cock Tavern " the squire found stabling for his horse and a room for himself, and then in the long dining-room still thick with lawyers and merchants at the end of their mid-day meal or their wine, he came upon a vacant table in a corner and ordered a bottle of Alicante. The drawer took out the cork.

" Don't pour it yet."

Harry Godwyn pushed a piece of silver in the direction of the drawer, an action which checked a careless haste.

"Is my friend Captain Night in the tavern?"

"Captain Night, no, sir, not here for two days past. He comes and goes, comes and goes." The drawer grinned.

"Do you know his whereabouts?"

"Captain Bunting might."

Harry Godwyn followed the drawer's finger and saw sitting by himself with a pot of beer in front of him a pock-marked man with a ragged moustache. His gaudy hat was the worse for wear, the point of his rapier peeped through the end of his scabbard.

"Present Mr. Godwyn's service to Captain Bunting and ask if he will join him in a bottle of wine."

The invitation to the dilapidated captain startled him as though from a dream. A stranger and a bottle of wine! Where? He sauntered over to the squire's table. The sweep of his hat was worthy of Whitehall.

"I do not think I have previously had the honour!"

"I intruded because I seek news of Captain Night. You'll help destroy this bottle with me."

"Good wine is an infallible introduction." Captain Bunting carefully seated himself on a stool.

"I am his brother; my name is Godwyn."

The captain had his second shock, and reared himself upright.

"You're the squire? Ods blood, but you're like him."

"Help yourself," said Harry Godwyn.

The captain made inroads on the bottle.

"Mind this," he said wiping his bedraggled moustache with the back of his hand. "I'd talk of a

friend like Tom to no one but his brother. You'll understand that."

"I appreciate your delicacy, Captain Bunting."

"And I'll never say aught against Tom. He's going to stand by me is Tom."

"Can you tell me where my brother may be discovered?"

"Tom's here and there—'The Cock' at mid-day often, 'The Lamb and Flag' by Covent Garden at night. I wait on his convenience. Believe me, Mr. Godwyn, he used to wait on mine. Times are altered."

Captain Bunting poured out some more of the Alicante.

"Tom will be glad to hear my message."

"I might find means to convey it, Mr. Godwyn. I'm a man to be trusted."

"Half the Godwyn farm in Kent belongs to him."

The tattered adventurer put down his glass.

"By Hannibal! Indeed his lucky month. The lawyers at their tricks, I'll swear. Half a farm, you say. Two fortunes instead of one!"

"How two fortunes?"

"He'll be rich without it. Still—half a farm!"

"I beg you to explain."

Captain Bunting craned forward.

"Tom's been hard driven. His good day has come at last. He's going to be rich even without the farm."

"This is cheering; I'll have to beg a share of him."

Captain Bunting put his finger on his lips.

"Mind, if you were not his brother——"

"I wish him well. Why should I be here? What's the secret?"

"A nobleman and a girl, I know so much. He's clever is Tom."

Harry Godwyn took his first sip of the wine.

"My brother is quick to seize an opportunity."

"The gallant's away with the wench within a day or two. Quick work. Tom's devilish clever. A hundred guineas for him—that's to start."

"Tom told you this?"

"Not all. But I'm no fool, Mr. Godwyn. I have my ears."

"You help him?"

Captain Bunting shrugged his shoulders.

"Tom's an old friend. He's short of guineas though—I told you that. You'll not have brought a small advance to town?"

The squire rose from his seat.

"You may be found here?"

"Till five of any afternoon."

"You'll hear of me again."

"There's no time like the present," said Captain Bunting regretfully, "I had hopes——"

The squire was already picking his way among the tables. Captain Bunting sighed, took up the bottle and held it to the light to see how much wine remained within.

Harry Godwyn reached Lincoln's Inn within ten minutes and found Robins waiting for him in the library.

"You were right, Robins."

"You have news?"

"Cursed news. And you?"

"Hardres was seized on the evening of the day his daughter left for Kent."

"Seized! By whom? Dover, the fiend."

" He was taken on a warrant by a file of soldiers from the Tower. Hales was responsible. Later Dover went to the Tower and through his influence Hardres was removed to Whitehall. He occupies a room under parole. Dover plays the friend."

" Friend! The hell-hound! Listen to what I've heard this afternoon, Robins."

He told of his discourse with Captain Bunting at " The Cock."

" I do not see the end of it," said Robins, wrinkling his forehead. " All this to-do and scheming. Dover cannot carry off Mistress Hardres."

" Can he not! You haven't seen her. Dover wants her. Did you ever hear of Dover being baulked about a woman? "

" Not often, but Mistress Hardres——"

" He'll be baulked this time. God help me, he'll be baulked."

" Harry," said Robins, " let's sit down and talk this over."

" I know a way, one sure way."

The squire dropped heavily into a chair.

" There are more ways than one and some are safer than others."

" We'll have Hardres free within a day or so."

" Curse Hardres! The girl; it's the girl I'm thinking of."

" Hardres released and the girl will be safe."

" Meanwhile Dover gets his hand on her; all he wants. She's attracted to him."

" So, so; we must face it, Harry."

" I know a way."

" You'd remove her one defender. Dover's a famous swordsman."

"Pah," said Harry Godwyn.

"I'll have watchers in Knightrider Street against her arrival from now on."

"How can they protect her?"

"When she arrives you'll gird your courage, Harry, and you'll go to her."

"Ah."

"You'll tell her the truth, all of it. You are not now concerned about your brother?"

"My brother does not exist for me any more."

"You'll tell her Dover's plot, you'll bid her stay—shelter with her friends in Knightrider Street for four and twenty hours. Assure her within that time all evidence against her father will be blown to nothing."

"In truth, there's nought to hold me from it, Robins."

"She'll forgive your lies at Ash."

Harry Godwyn jumped up from the table. "I flinch from the way she'll look at me; that's all. Of course I'll do it."

"If you should fail——"

"How can I fail?"

"Suppose Dover is there!"

"I'll see her, have no fear."

"If by any illchance you do not—well then in the morning I go with you to my Lord Devonshire—an intrusion on a great man, but the master would wish it."

"There'll be no need for my Lord Devonshire."

"Two menservants I can trust shall be at Knightrider Street. I'll make excuse for their loitering. I've affairs in progress for Jonson, the goldbeater. One shall come to 'The Cock' for you as soon as she arrives."

Harry Godwyn picked up his hat.

" I'd best go and tend my horse. I thank you for your good help, Robins."

" Return here when you have seen Mistress Hardres, Harry. To-morrow we must round the business off."

The roan had been saddled for hours, and the squire, on the strain with fears and doubts, was near the point of going off to join the watchers when word came that Edith Hardres had reached the linen-draper's. Within five minutes he was on his way. As he turned from Addle Hill near Ludgate into Knightrider Street he noted that her horse had been taken to the stable, that there was no sign of a chair or coach in waiting, and he judged that Dover was to let her rest the night.

An apprentice was putting up the shutters as Harry Godwyn dismounted in front of the shop.

" I am a friend of Mistress Hardres. Is she within? "

" She's inside with Mistress Richardson, Mr. Richardson too. You can't see her now."

The squire crossed the step, glanced round the shop, with its numberless drawers, its rolls of material, its wide counter with a yard stick on it and saw a door half-hidden by a curtain in the rear. The youth had followed him in.

" I must see Mistress Hardres and speedily."

" She's terrible upset."

" Tell her it's Mr. Godwyn, that I bring good news."

" I dussent do it. Mr. Richardson——"

" Then I'll go myself."

The squire made a movement towards the door, and the frightened apprentice hurried in front of him.

" All right, I'll go and tell Mr. Richardson. What was the name. She's terrible upset, mark you."

" Godwyn, Squire Godwyn."

A minute went by then came the sound of footsteps

and the door behind the curtain was opened and Edith Hardres came forth, followed by an old man with a bald head. She had lost her colour, her hair was in disarray, tear marks were on her cheeks, but nevertheless she held herself upright and stiff. Harry Godwyn felt the assurance depart from him.

"It was all untrue, Mistress Hardres. I have come to make amends."

"Amends!"

Her voice was blurred, hopeless.

"I misled you. I want to save your father. I am here to give you the truth."

"The truth," boomed Sergeant Richardson, as he reached down beneath the counter.

"You wicked man," said Edith Hardres.

"Hear me——"

"Go, you wicked man." She lifted her finger feebly towards the street.

There was a rattle at the counter and Harry Godwyn turned to find the barrel of a carbine in line with his head.

"Outside or you'll go in pieces. The better way for such as you."

A sinister steadiness was in the eyes of the old Ironside.

"This is madness——"

"I count three and three only."

"I came to tell Mistress Hardres——"

"One——"

He saw her standing like a marble figure, saw the bald head lowered level with the barrel of the carbine, resting on the counter.

"Two——"

Harry Godwyn edged sideways towards the door.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A FLANK ATTACK

HARRY GODWYN, his hat on the floor, his sword across his knees, sat in the window recess looking on and listening while Robins explained the situation to the middle-aged man whose braided coat, beribboned breeches, and glossy wig marked his pretentions to fashion. The usual genial flamboyance of Richard Bolney was tempered by the crisis to a respectful attention. Not that he so far forgot himself as to show any trace of a servitor's humbleness. His head was reared, his eyes were full of alert concern, he twisted the end of his moustache in friendly solicitude.

"You know all the people at Whitehall or know of them," said Robins, "you know Dover and his circle. What can we do within the next twelve hours?"

"It reminds me of my affair some years ago with Lady Darley. You'll not remember it. Hamilton had bewitched her and I had to make a night venture with a knife under my armpit, a broken lattice——"

"We must push to this present business, Bolney."

"The case was similar; it had its lessons. But as you will." He cast his eyes to the ceiling in thought.

"There's Devonshire," he said at length.

"I've tried him. I went to see him at his house in Covent Garden while Mr. Godwyn was at Knightrider Street. His Lordship was busy—he could not fail to be at this time—deep this evening in collecting the con-

sciences of the bishops on their Sovereign. He was patient enough. He cannot see that aught is to be done beyond a declaration by Mr. Godwyn that the charges against Sir Valentine Hardres are false. He promised to try to get a word sometime to-morrow with Mr. Pepys. That does not help us to-night."

Bolney checked his disappointment.

"Devonshire was the likeliest. I was present when he felled Colonel Culpepper to the floor in the presence of the King. When younger he had an eye and a heart. I should have thought this tale of love in distress—Mr. Cornwallis's friend——"

"I wish to make this matter quite clear to you, Mr. Bolney," said Harry Godwyn, rising from his seat, and walking over to the pair in the middle of the room. "I have to free Sir Valentine Hardres from these accusations made in my name. I have to save Mistress Hardres from Lord Dover, who has found his opportunity in this attack on her father. My obligation will be the plainer when I tell you that the forger who used my name was my own brother. No, don't stop me, Robins. Everyone may know it now. Mr. Bolney, you will be quick to perceive that my honour is engaged to preserve this girl from harm. I shall proceed to the extremity."

"The decision of a gentleman," said Bolney. "I should have been driven to it myself."

"I wish to guard you against an error. There is no question of love or romance between Mistress Hardres and myself. This is no amorous adventure."

"In all discretion, I remember——"

"I carry a duty to myself, also a duty to the name of my family. I have a settlement to make with Lord Dover. I seek my own self-respect, nothing more. I intend to secure it."

"I'll swear Mistress Hardres will find cause for thanks to you," said Robins.

"Who is to care about her thanks? In any case, I doubt it. She's pulled by Dover."

Bolney tweaked thoughtfully at his moustache.

"Dover is the beginning and end of the riddle."

"What of your friends? Is there none at court who can help us?" asked Robins.

"If I were young like Mr. Godwyn, and had such reasons, I'd know my course."

"You're right, Mr. Bolney, I've known it from the start. All else is fooling."

"What's this?" Robins looked from one to the other.

"A special word of caution," said Bolney. "Beware his sudden two inch thrust when he's at extension. It comes both from wrist and shoulders. Here, I'll show you, lend me your sword."

"We'll have no talk of swords," said Robins, stepping between them. "Harry, you're not going to run the hazard of being spitted by Lord Dover."

"I'll stop him once for all, Robins."

"Suppose he stops you, what then?"

"Well, damme, that's the end of it."

"A fine achievement for Mistress Hardres!"

"Show me another road."

"I should be pleased to act as Mr. Godwyn's friend in this affair," said Bolney. "I have stood in shirt and breeches myself more than once. I know Dover's tricks. It was in these very fields outside here——"

"You swashbuckling fool," cried Robins. "Is this your help. I thought you had some wits."

Robins swung round on Harry Godwyn with uplifted forefinger. "You need the truth, Harry, and you're going to have it. You've prated about your family name

and your debt of honour. You're mad with jealousy of Dover. Safety of the girl, what's that to you? You want revenge on Dover. Let's have no pretence about it."

The squire reddened.

"What would you have me do, Robins? It's true I want revenge on Dover. But if by good fortune I ran him through, would not that serve Mistress Hardres beyond all else?"

"He's fought a score of duels. You could not look to come alive from an encounter with Dover."

"I'm no novice. I'm twenty years younger than he is. The cleverest of swordsmen make mistakes. Besides, there comes a time to every man—to let Dover go unchallenged in all that he is doing—it's beyond me, Robins. You must not try to put a stop on this, old friend."

"The issue would probably be a happy one," said Bolney. "I remember when I stood up with Desart against Mulberry——"

"I'll tell you why I do not wish you to run on death with Dover, Harry. Mr. Cornwallis, to whom I owe everything, has left me here in charge in his absence. Mr. Cornwallis has great affection for you—whether you know it or not, you are as dear to him as a son. He has no one else. Mr. Cornwallis is very rich as well as very powerful. You force me to break a confidence. Mr. Cornwallis in his will has left you the sole heir to all that he possesses."

"What!"

"Snakes and garters!" ejaculated Bolney.

"Now you see my anxiety. I have a trust."

Harry Godwyn's sword dropped from his knees to the floor.

"I'd be overwhelmed by this at any other time."

"It's worth a thought even now," said Bolney.

"What would he say, Harry, if I let you go—if you were hurt."

Harry Godwyn picked up his sword.

"I cannot promise that I will not fight Dover. It may be necessary. I will wait to see if there is a better way. Once Edith Hardres is safe I will not pursue Dover. Is that enough for you?"

"I must make it do," said Robins with a grimace. He turned on Bolney.

"Now, you bloodthirsty ruffian, think of something else and keep away from swords and duels."

"By your leave, it's Mr. Godwyn now who is forced to our protection."

"What's in your mind?"

"Sir George Oakley, he loathes Dover—the same kidney—handles a good blade—needs money too. Five hundred pounds to pick a quarrel——"

"You'd set him on to Dover?"

"Why not?"

"Say no more of it. What would the master think?" Robins scratched his head. "A temptation though—'twould give us time—might settle everything."

"I'll have no man fight my battle with Dover," said the squire decisively.

"Yet Oakley would be the very one," went on Bolney regretfully. "He once had his eye on Dorothy Laden, Dover's flame. I wonder if Dorothy Laden——"

Bolney stopped in the grip of a new idea.

"I have talked with Mistress Dorothy Laden many a time. She likes my stories. If I had been a younger man—everyone knows her foolishness. By Heaven, I believe I have it."

"We've no use for a foolish woman," said Robins.

"Not if she were just about as foolish as Mr. Godwyn?"

"Eh," said the squire.

It was Bolney's turn to take command; no man more pleased.

"Dover's a rare one with women."

"A long record," said Robins.

"He still has his ardours—a weakness at fifty, if I say it myself. Sybil Putley at the Duke of York's Theatre was his latest—before he went to Kent—and she followed Dorothy Laden. Dover was on and off with Dorothy Laden for years—a pretty woman now, upon my soul."

"How can she give us help?" asked Robins.

"Hear about her first—for therein lies the secret of it. A curious young woman. Besought by many. She has been tossed aside by Dover, yet keeps up hope, will look at consolation from no other. Did I not say she was foolish?"

"You'd work upon her jealousy?"

"The wench has a sharp tongue, looks like an angel, probes the faults of all from His Majesty downwards and is blind as a bat about Dover. She was sick for a month when he gave her up. Afterwards had no hard word to say about him—there's a woman for you!"

"Whitehall has its marvels," said Robins.

"She'd be a saint if she weren't something else. You expect Dover to make his stroke to-morrow?"

"The morning will be his time to get Mistress Hardres to his home at Piccadilly," said Harry Godwyn.

"It may be we can get Mistress Laden there before her."

"Mistress Laden there!" exclaimed the startled squire.

"A queen already in possession."

"What would Dover do?"

"What would Mistress Hardres do? From all you've said of her I'll warrant that a disillusioned girl would quickly be riding back to her good linen-draper's."

"It would destroy him," cried the squire. "But would it? He's infernal quick. What think you of it, Robins?"

"I think that at last Bolney has his wits at work to some purpose."

"Give me a minute to write a letter," said Bolney. He went to a table and when he rose from his seat he was waving a piece of paper in the air to dry the writing. "I send to her as an old friend who knows her devotion to Lord Dover. The chance to do her service has come to me, been thrust upon me. An accidental meeting with one unspecified. The waverer's regret—old fires relit—a word of longing—the doors ajar."

"Will she take your word?" asked Robins.

"She'd take the word of a stable boy if it gave her hope about Dover."

"I'm sorry we have to play the trick on her," said the squire. "I'm glad I'm not to see her."

"Mr. Godwyn may quiet his discomfort," said Bolney, sealing the letter. "A gush of temper to-morrow, a raging scorn at me for my stupidity when next we meet. That's the worst. I may even have her thanks. Devices more outrageous have joined up parted lovers."

"Where can she be found to-night?" asked Robins.

"She has a lodging in St. Martin's Lane. I'll ride there now myself."

"She must not see you."

"There's a crack beneath the door."

Harry Godwyn and Robins standing at the window saw Bolney come from the stable yard and ride off westward into the dusk.

"You're thinking he's just a braggart and a swaggerer," said Robins.

"You put a deal of trust in him."

"We've proved him sound and loyal. His talk's his weakest part, yet 'tis not without its value in the coffee houses and the taverns. He's full of boastings. There's not a word of untruth in him. Does that surprise you?"

"It's plain against all teaching."

"He's stout-hearted, no mean swordsman. He has experience and good sense. There's no end to human nature, Harry!"

"He did not enlarge his friendship with this woman."

"More likely to have understated it. Why should he know about the crack beneath her door? I am sure that Bolney will contrive that Mistress Laden is at Dover's house to-morrow morning. But there are hazards at the best, Harry. I'm glad Devonshire is so far enlisted that he will seek a word with Pepys. I look ahead."

"Dover might quiet Mistress Laden, send her off. He's plausible. He has the ear of Edith Hardres."

"Whatever plan we had we'd face a hundred chances."

"Mistress Laden will go early to the house—no doubt of that from all that's said. Dover may get rid of her in time."

"All supposings, Harry—and they lead to nowhere."

"They may lead me to Piccadilly in the morning," said the squire.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MISTRESS DOROTHY LADEN

AT eleven o'clock the next morning while Lord Dover was performing those duties of attendance at Whitehall which should presently afford him hours of liberty for his own affairs, a Sedan chair came to a halt before his residence at St. James, and Mistress Dorothy Laden, light of foot, tripped up the steps and raised the knocker. Her dove-grey hood framed delicate features which had caused James, years before, to vow she was more than human, and those lustrous blue eyes had lost none of their sparkle despite her thirty years. Flowing satin in harmony with her hood encircled a girlish figure. She had escaped maturity's horrid touch, and in the knowledge of it nourished a constant hope. A passing disagreement, she had told her friends; she had found it needful to correct the bold bad Jermyn more than once.

Some smiled behind her back; others consented that she might reign again precariously as the queen of a changing court. Dover was incalculable, and flitted here and there—but where was Mistress Laden's durable competitor? So dainty a creature with wit to heighten beauty! Dover hated fools for long.

The steward who opened the door had as blank a face as respectfulness would allow, but his obsequiousness told plainly she was expected.

"His Lordship is not within but comes at any moment. Would madam be pleased to enter?"

She followed him through the hall, past the spreading

oaken staircase, into the withdrawing room, and there found a resting-place in the window seat amid embroidered cushions.

"Leave word to tell his Lordship as soon as he arrives that Mistress—that a lady awaits him."

The man bowed.

"Madam would doubtless that the housekeeper should attend her?"

"Mistress Hardman, yes, I'll see her."

"Mistress Hardman is in Hertfordshire, madam. We have now Mistress Bailey—this six months past."

"Send her to me."

He backed from the room, leaving Dorothy Laden with a heart beating high for all her imperious airs. At last then he had found out where his happiness lay. More than a year since she had crossed his threshold, and he could not do without her any longer. She smiled as she thought how she would chide him—not too harshly. She would not lose him again.

Her eyes fell on the familiar leopard skin rugs, the silver candlesticks, the Medici tapestry which covered one side of the room, the carved ebony cabinet—all bringing recollections of those exhilarating months when no other woman mattered. Why had he delayed so long? She found herself in currents of forgiveness.

The grey-haired housekeeper entered with a curtsey, and Mistress Dorothy Laden was all graciousness.

"Perhaps madam would like to see her chamber. His Lordship left commands."

"I should be obliged."

As they crossed the hall the guest bethought herself.

"My boxes will be sent for."

"His Lordship gave instructions. He believed that madam would arrive in some haste."

"I had so informed him."

Behind her smiles Mistress Laden was deciding that Dover should have a word in season about so complete an assurance.

"He wished you to know that after paying his duty to the King this morning he designed to wait on you."

"The King has first call upon his Lordship."

As they mounted the stairs she stopped to admire a palm, some plants with brilliant foliage, on the landing.

"His Lordship had them brought in yesterday. They came by carriers' cart from Hertfordshire."

From Hertfordshire! Never before had he been so thoughtful.

"This is your chamber, madam."

The housekeeper opened a door to display what might have been a boudoir but for the canopied bed; a bower of lace and dimity, blue silken curtains by the sides of the windows, a blue satin coverlet on the bed, with silver scent bottles, pomade and trinket boxes spread before a mirror. The room was scented with the roses, pink and white, which were massed on the window ledge.

"Indeed I shall be happy here! Roses, too."

"His Lordship wished to meet what he thought might be madam's liking."

"He is very kind," Mistress Laden sighed.

She turned full upon the housekeeper.

"Did not his Lordship inform you of my name?"

"No, madam; he spoke of the daughter of a friend."

"The daughter of a friend!"

"The room adjoining was prepared, but his Lordship told me yesterday madam's father would be delayed for some days."

"Yes, some days."

Dover was thorough in his little stratagems.

"Perhaps madam would prefer to rest here till his Lordship returns?"

Mistress Laden did not answer; her eye had caught a delicate scent sachet inscribed with ink which lay on the pillow. She went forward and picked it up, and at first so great was her surprise that the words had little meaning for her. Then she went cold and dumb.

"Where did this come from?"

"I have not seen it before, madam. His Lordship was in here this morning."

Mistress Laden read the inscription again and this time the words burned through her. "To Mistress Hardres. May she have the sweetest sleep that ever sweetest lady needed."

"So this is what I came for." Her eyes had lost their sparkle, her voice had a metallic ring which went badly with her beauty. "What else do you know? What has his Lordship said about this visit? Tell me, woman."

She bent forward, her fist doubled. The housekeeper fumbled for words in her amazement.

"'Twas for you, madam, was it not? His Lordship——"

Mistress Laden stamped her foot furiously.

"What did Lord Dover tell you about this visit?"

"Nought but that your father——"

"My father, you fool. My father's been in Heaven these ten years."

"He said you were to come from Kent——"

"Kent! Why Kent?" She laughed loudly. "My Lord becomes idyllic."

She snatched up a fan from the dressing-table and advanced on the woman with it.

"What slut is being brought here? Tell me, tell me."

"I've told you all I know, madam."

"Liar. I've been tricked, I——"

The housekeeper had pulled open the door for a retreat to the landing, and from the hall below came the sound of men's voices.

"Who's that?"

"His Lordship has returned, madam."

"He has, has he?"

She cast sachet and fan to the floor and sped for the stairs. His voice seemed deeper than of old; he was in altercation with a servant. Well he might be!

On the second flight with a view of the hall below her, she came to a halt. She had no sight of Lord Dover. A young man in riding boots, with sword hanging from his baldric, was haranguing the steward. "I tell you I'll wait. Let him be one hour or two."

"My instructions are that his Lordship does not receive to-day——"

"He has to receive me. Make the best of it."

"His Lordship has guests. I shall be compelled——"

"Guests! Already. Who are they?"

"I am one of them," said Mistress Dorothy Laden from the bottom of the stairs. "What is your will?"

Harry Godwyn removed his hat. So this was the woman spoken of by Bolney.

"I looked for another, madam."

Mistress Laden swept across the hall, churning many conjectures.

"I am an old friend of my Lord Dover. I may be of service in his absence."

She turned to the steward. "You may go. Take those other louts with you."

She waited till he and two servants in the background had disappeared, and then she said, "Now, sir, what is

this affair of yours? You may impart it freely. I see it is impatient of delay."

"Lord Dover is the one to hear it, madam."

"You're here to choke the life from him. I know the signs. Or are you——"

A sudden thought had struck her, far-fetched, ridiculous yet not impossible.

"Are you the so-called father? Father, by Heavens! You're a pretty father."

"Father?"

"Hide nothing from me. I'm here to see Harry Jermyn. He'll regret my visit more than yours."

"I play no part, madam."

"But you know this girl? Who is she? I've seen her room. Pretty blue curtains. Roses, by God!—he never gave me roses."

"I think we have a common errand."

She looked at him in bewilderment, brushed her hand across her eyes to dash away her tears.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Harry Godwyn. I come from Kent. Lord Dover is ensnaring a young girl I know. I'm here to stop him."

"You'll not stop him. Tell me about it."

"You would not welcome the story, madam. You would not think Lord Dover to be a villain."

"Would I not!"

A sob rose in her throat. "I'm Dorothy Laden—what's that name to you! There are others who would know it. A foul lie has brought me here to-day. Let me hear. I have some kind of a right."

Harry Godwyn told her in a dozen sentences all that she had need to know, and before he had finished she had dropped a horrid imprecation.

"You've come to fight him?" she cried at last, and then before he could reply went on contemptuously. "He'll make mincemeat of you. You play his game by coming here."

"I'd think no shame of it to go away, if I were sure that Mistress Hardres would be safe."

"There can be no surety. Yet you serve best by going. This girl, she'll not listen to you, nor have the chance—he'll see to that. As to your sword—poof! Besides he has his servants. He may not choose to run you through."

"You put me in two minds, madam. Your presence helps."

"I'm your best weapon, but he has vast resource. I may be thrown out—a baggage—and he'll have a good story for it promptly. I'll try for a word to this little fool of yours. I' faith, I've not much hope for her, but you make damnation sure by stopping here. You're a young madman who's in his way, and you're found within his doors. Could he ask for better fortune. She'll be whisked away from sight or hearing. Show your sword and he'll kill you like a rat."

"You would make me helpless."

"Follow them here—he's on his way for her this minute without a doubt. If I send her forth, up with her and away—I'll hold him for the minute. Ride with her to shelter—where, I know not—but ride fast."

"And if you fail?"

"You'll see me in the street instead of her. What then? Can you raise a troop to storm the house? There's nought beside. No, squire, if I am bundled forth, turn tail, ride back to your farm in Kent, and put behind you noble lords and wenches."

"To-morrow——"

"To-morrow!" She laughed harshly. "This girl likes him, you say? I tell you that if she passes one night beneath his roof your only happiness will be in forgetting her. Do you think she'd be the first? Do you think I'm the only one?"

"You decide me, madam. All the work will not be left for you," he said as he turned and walked towards the door.

"You'll have at least some chance to run away!"

Mistress Laden looked through the window as Harry Godwyn mounted his horse and rode off eastward.

"I almost wish I'd let him stay," she said. "A surprise for Satan."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE ENCOUNTER

EDITH HARDRES walked from the door of the linen-draper's shop to pat the neck of her horse which stood ready saddled, gave a look at Dover's handsome bay and the pony on which the groom was strapping her small bundle of belongings, and turned rein in hand for a goodbye to Richardson and his wife in the doorway. Dover finished some instructions to the groom, and stepped to help her to the saddle.

She bore no marks of last night's woefulness, of the weeping agitations which had moistened her pillow in the long hours of darkness, and she forced a smile towards her friends and had a lively word of chiding for her restive mount. No stranger would have thought of tremors beneath that cheerfulness. The linen-draper looked on in stolidity, and Mrs. Richardson wiped her eyes with the end of her scarf.

Two men observed the scene from the porch of St. Maudlen's Church at the eastern end of the street, saw Dover tighten the girth of the bay and get to the saddle, saw Edith Hardres prick her horse to his side.

"What did I tell you?" said Harry Godwyn between his teeth.

"Note that Dover has his sword but no pistols," said Bolney. "The groom is unarmed."

The group moved off, Dover and Edith Hardres side by side, the groom behind, leading the pony. Halfway

along the street the girl twisted round and waved her hand to the couple still standing at the doorway of the shop. Harry Godwyn's heart jumped as he remembered how she had once given him just such a sign. It had been the happiest sight of all his life—far away now.

He watched her—light as a feather in the saddle—the straight young back, the twinkling movement of hand and foot, the sparkle of her as she turned with some quick question to Dover. The squire's hand grew white with its grip on the porch.

When the riders had turned the corner which took them to Ludgate, Bolney very brisk and practical led the way from the porch round to the side of the church where his horse with that of the squire was tied to an iron ring in the wall.

"Two miles in which to pick and choose," he said as they mounted.

"She went gladly enough," said the squire. "How much think you was courage?"

"Good women are always one quarter mad—it makes them lovable. I remember when Nell put her hand on mine in the Stone Corridor and Charles not ten yards away——"

"I've seen her less lively on a hunting morning."

"Silver buckles, a gay blue coat and wickedness—few women can withstand the combination. Would that I had had my share of wickedness."

"He'll get his payment," muttered Harry Godwyn.

"They generally get it—without help. Here we are, squire."

They turned from Creed Lane into the shadow of rising new St. Paul's, with the crowded hill of Ludgate sloping down before them, and joined in the current of the traffic. In a minute they had a glimpse of Dover and

Edith Hardres a hundred yards or more ahead, proceeding westward at a foot-pace. Many vehicles intervened, some coming, some going, public coaches, a waggon laden with straw, tradesmen's carts, a sedan chair with its bearers weaving in and out for passage. Here and there others besides themselves were in the saddle. Lines of pedestrians straggled along by the shops.

"We'll keep on behind them till after Temple Bar," said Bolney.

"I hate to see him getting nearer."

"Best wait for the openness round Charing Cross. Hang your holster on the cantle of your saddle. That's right. Tuck in the flap of it."

They were crossing into Fleet Street with Dover and his companions well in view on the rise when Harry Godwyn said, "I trust this brings you into no trouble with Robins."

"He would have stopped me, you too, perhaps. He'll come home and find me gone on my wild errand and be most prayerfully glad. He is much concerned about you, squire. Otherwise he'd not have gone to Devonshire again this morning."

"I came to bring word of my attempt in case of ill result."

"I jumped at fortune's gift."

"A sorry gift from fortune, Bolney—a friend in need."

"You'll be a rich man some day, squire; I'm a poor one."

"I know your quips, friend Bolney. I'll owe you more than money for all this."

"Poverty's the root of most adventure—leaving out the women."

"You'd fight the man who called you mercenary."

"I'd fight him—for the truth of it. Yet 'tis not all money—a flaw, alas, or my pockets would not now be light. I have gentle blood in me—there's the secret. I'm the second cousin of a baronet. He drank himself to death."

"They seem to have disappeared," said the squire, lifting himself in the stirrups.

"Only the bend at St. Clement's; I've been waiting for it."

Bolney set a gentle trot, and Dover was soon in sight again, and at Somerset House the gap had been lessened to little more than a pistol shot. The road was clear between except for a city merchant on his nag, and two apprentices carrying a roll of cloth.

"We're half-way there," said the squire.

"Hold till Charing Cross unless they turn and see us. You think she'll listen, squire?"

"I speak to him and not to her. A respectful bearing, an urgent message. The surprise will pull them up. A dozen words, that's all. Hardres is safe. Dover prisoned him."

"He's mortal quick."

"I'll be out of reach before I've finished speaking."

"Suppose you're still the plotter, he the rescuer?"

"I'll not believe it. She's known me years. It's all distress about her father—nought besides."

"You'll speed away?"

"I'll run. My great hope is that he'll run after me."

"It might be well but not for your blood-letting reasons. I'll have my part to play when you go helter-skelter. If he doesn't follow you I can but lie in wait for opportunity."

"If he should chase after me?"

"I take charge then. A maid in distress! Her name? Can it be the daughter of my old friend, Hardres? What Providence that I should be along the Strand this morning! I escort her back to safety and the linen-draper. I liked his looks. He has a blunderbuss, you say."

"I'll have some thanks to give you, Bolney, when this is finished."

"More likely you'll be blaming me for bungling the affair. Ah, what's he at? He straightened her reins for her. He hasn't lost his little ways."

"An excuse to rest his hand on her arm," said the squire, with unsteady voice.

"It keeps him occupied—all we need."

"Why doesn't she draw away? Smiles at what he says. She has to, curse him——"

"Pooh, no torture that. A girl's a girl."

"Eh?"

"A noble Lord, a gay blue coat, silver buckles——"

"The road's free," broke in the squire. "I'm going for it." He touched the roan with his spurs.

"On with you, then," said Bolney. "I'll give attention to the groom."

The pair were still abreast, still talking, as Harry Godwyn rode up to the side of Edith Hardres, pushed a yard or so further, swung his horse's head round to stop their progress and confronted them.

"What's this?" said Dover, in fierce surprise. "Why it's——"

"I have an urgent message, my Lord."

"A message, you!"

Dover's hand went over to the pommel of his sword.

"I have to say——" and then for all his resolution Harry Godwyn turned to Edith Hardres, and what he

saw gave him a catch in the throat. Horror was in her. Her hands with the reins in them had dropped to her horse's neck. Her lips had parted. He might have been some dreadful apparition.

"Your father is safe," he said, hoarsely. "This man——"

Dover kicked furiously at his horse to come round at him, and there was a hustling together of the three as Harry Godwyn backed the roan. The withers of the girl's horse separated them, and the squire leaned across to her in a fervour of explanation. She threw out her arm as though to protect Dover from attack, and in that revelation Harry Godwyn became a man possessed.

Only the confusion between the horses saved the squire from the shining blade which darted over the neck of Edith Hardres' mount as he pressed forward. Dover jerked back his elbow to shorten his weapon, but the squire was on him now, and in a twinkling his pistol had crashed home on Dover's head with a force which would have killed a man of thinner skull. Dover's sword dropped from his grasp, he swayed like a drunken man, then pitched sideways to the street, with one foot hanging in the stirrup. The squire swept round towards Edith Hardres and had a glimpse of Bolney arguing with the groom and blocking his way, saw aproned shopmen running from their doors, heard shouts from right and left. Swift and short as had been the encounter, the girl had partly recovered from the first shock; her face was white, but she had gathered up the reins, and her terrified gaze came quickly from the fallen man to Harry Godwyn as he drove his horse to her side.

"Loose your reins," he cried harshly. His arm went round her waist and he half lifted, half dragged her to the saddle in front of him. He expected opposition but

she clung to him to prevent herself from falling. She need have had no fear, for he held her like a vice. With his free hand he guided the roan to Bedford Street which was nearly opposite to them on the other side of the Strand. A dozen were by now around the unconscious Dover, and Bolney, who had now become the good Samaritan, was bending over him with a scarf. People were hurrying from all sides, and as Harry Godwyn threaded his way through the gathering crowd there were shouts of "An abductor!" "He's killed him," "He's taking the girl." But curiosity about the dead or injured nobleman was sufficient to keep any from the task of trying to delay him. He was nearly at the top of Bedford Street with Covent Garden opening in front before a straggling line of pursuers started from the Strand.

The heat of the fight had been transformed for Harry Godwyn by the inspiration when he took Edith Hardres to his saddle. He knew that Bedford Street led straight to Covent Garden near at hand. He saw the way to sure protection for her if he were able to avoid detention, if the roan could hasten with a double load for some few minutes. The suspense was quickly over, and then as he urged his horse in a last straining effort for a hundred yards he had a touch of angry pride. He had paid his debt to her though she did not know it. She had felt his rough hands, perhaps might yet regard him as a murderer. She would presently learn she owed him something and very likely hate the thought of it. She was still clutching him tightly, her eyes were shut, he could feel her breath on his face, the rise and fall of her breast.

A porter with a box of oranges on his shoulder was at the corner of Henrietta Street.

"The Earl of Devonshire's house?" demanded the squire.

The startled porter put his box of oranges on the ground.

"Here be, master, in front of ye at the corner," said he, pointing to a two-storied dwelling on the left.

"Mistress Hardres, friends are in this house."

She opened her eyes, took her arm from round him and held to his coat.

"I'll help you down."

He lowered her carefully, realised that she was trembling, saw her totter, as she touched the ground. He jumped from the saddle, picked her up and carried her to the door, and, sparing ceremony, kicked at it lustily. She struggled to her feet, not yet quite herself.

"I was very frightened for you, Mr. Godwyn," she said.

Cataracts roared in Harry Godwyn's head, then the door opened and a servant stood before them.

"Is Mr. Robins here?" he said in a voice he did not recognise as his own. Before the man could answer he spied a well-known figure at the back of the hall.

"Robins," he shouted, "this is Mistress Hardres."

He raced back to his horse as the first of the pursuers came up and seized the bridle. "Stand back," he thundered, as he scrambled to the saddle, and the would-be captor released his hold. He suddenly perceived that this madman who had struck a nobleman from his horse was no safe person to frustrate. The squire indeed was in a frenzy. He would have charged a regiment.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE INTERVENTION OF LORD DEVONSHIRE

"MISTRESS HARDRES!"

A dozen agitated surprises shot through Robins as he reached the dishevelled girl—still holding her riding whip as she stood on the threshold, a doubting, anxious little figure.

"Are you the Earl of Devonshire?"

"I can take you to him. You've been in an excitement?"

He put out his hand and drew her away from the door so that it might be closed, and then motioned the servant to go away.

"I am a friend of Mr. Godwyn's," he said.

"You know about my father?"

"I have been talking to Lord Devonshire about him. Why has Mr. Godwyn fled away, Mistress Hardres? What has happened? I see your dress is torn."

She looked ruefully at her sleeve and in all her distress a twinkle peeped from her eye. "Squire Godwyn is rough," she said, but seriousness came back to her instantly. "A dreadful thing! In the Strand——"

A tall man came forward from the back of the hall; in the dimness Edith Hardres could not see his face clearly, but was conscious of fine clothes, caught the glint of a steel-hilted rapier, heard a voice deep and authoritative.

"What is the intrusion, Robins?"

"Mistress Hardres has been brought here, my lord."

"Mistress Hardres, eh?"

Edith Hardres's hood was to one side, her hair blown loose, one of her gloves gone, and Devonshire did not miss these signs even while in his first quick look he had enlightment on Dover's bewitchment. Devonshire had been no anchorite, and increasing years and high preoccupation had not dulled in him the message of beauty.

"An honour, though unexpected, Mistress Hardres."

"An utter surprise for me, my lord," said Robins. "There was no design in this."

"I can use my eyes. Mistress Hardres has a story for us by all appearances."

"I was carried to your door," said Edith Hardres. "People were pursuing. Mr. Godwyn knew not where to go."

"We'll count it a privilege," said Devonshire gently. "I have this hour discussed with Mr. Robins here what might be done to help your father. You are not hurt?"

"No, no; this disarray was in the scramble. But Lord Dover, he lies in the Strand."

"Dover!" exclaimed both men together.

"Squire Godwyn struck him from his horse, and he is either insensible or dead. Mr. Godwyn lifted me to his own horse and brought me here."

Devonshire went to a gong which was on a marble stand near the door, gave it a blow, and to the manservant who appeared in the hall he said sharply—

"Send Travers and Brown to the front of the house to disperse the people who are gathering there. Travers to go to the Strand, and find out the news of Lord Dover who has suffered an assault. Make speed."

The servant went hurrying out and Devonshire turned and led the way through a door on the right to a low-

ceiled room lined with books. He placed a chair for the girl.

"You bring serious news, Mistress Hardres. Lord Dover struck the squire?"

He stood with his hands linked behind his long purple coat, his big mouth shut hard like a trap.

"He had no chance, my lord."

Devonshire lifted his eyebrows.

"Did you know Squire Godwyn was to make an attack on Lord Dover?"

"How should I?"

"Complication in this business, Robins."

"Means danger for the squire? He's able to take care of himself."

Devonshire sniffed.

"This is no job of building haystacks." He turned quickly on Edith Hardres.

"Why did you go alone with Dover?"

"He was working every hour to get my father free."

"I fear I must call you foolish, Mistress Hardres. Dover is a liar."

"A liar!"

"Lord Dover is expert with the affections of young women. He laid a snare for you."

"What are you saying, my lord?"

"Do you like Lord Dover? Nay, you must not flinch. Others will ask the question."

Edith Hardres rose up from her chair; she was no suppliant now.

"I am in this house willynilly. I wish to go."

She made towards the door but Devonshire was before her and barred her way.

"I had reasons, Mistress Hardres. I cannot act in the dark."

"Stand aside, my lord, and let me pass."

"I'll make my peace with your father when I see him," said Devonshire quietly, without moving.

Robins by the girl's side seized her arm. "His lordship means to help you. He intends no harm by what he said."

"No harm!" she cried, and tried to pull herself loose.

"Be sensible, Mistress Hardres," said Devonshire. "Why should I seek to offend you? Is there no cause for my questions?"

"You outrage me, my lord," said Edith Hardres, constrained, erect; her hands were shaking.

"Mistress Hardres, I must speak plainly. I am raising a hand in this matter because I learn Squire Godwyn is something like the adopted son of a friend absent in my service. I have never seen him. He seems to be a youthful madman who has endangered your father. Part of the story is that you were on the way alone to stay at the house of Lord Dover—a doubtful friend to say the least—though a fascinating man. I must be on firm ground if I am to help."

"You think I may have been enamoured of Lord Dover?"

Edith Hardres looked from one to other of the two men.

"Oh, wicked, wicked!" she exclaimed.

"I have heard you are a young woman of courage and intelligence," said Devonshire. "That would not prevent you from misjudgment of such a man as Dover."

"I don't believe it," suddenly spluttered Robins. "I don't believe it, my lord."

"You think me harsh, Mistress Hardres," went on Devonshire. "I intend to try to get your father free whatever you may say."

He was calm and hard; Edith as she looked at him found some of her temper ebbing.

"I'll bear what you have said if you get father out of prison, and thank you too. I am not used to men like you, my lord. You cannot know the truth or you would not so have spoken."

"Better trust me than Dover," said Devonshire drily.

"Dover!" cried Edith with sudden passion. "Have I been so great a fool? I'll tell you why I went with Dover. Did you ever have a father, my lord? Perhaps you had a mother too, and brothers and sisters. You cannot understand me, I daresay. I have only my father. He is everything to me. They say he is sharp of tongue. I have never had an angry word from him. He is always kind and indulgent. He has taught me all I know. I don't know what I should do without him. In every hour of the day he is the kindest, dearest father. No one knows him as I do."

The words tumbled from her, her face shone with feeling. Devonshire, with folded arms, eyed her thoughtfully; Robins, fidgetting in discomfort, made believe to look out of the window.

"They sent to arrest father for some trumpery thing. It's all a mystery to me now—only a spite against him. But father knew the danger. Men in these years have been sent to prison, aye, and to the block for little or nothing. What chance would father have? It was a nightmare. In London Lord Dover came to our aid. We were overjoyed to see him. Our alarm was multiplied by what he told us. I rode alone to Kent to face father's accuser. I have hardly slept since. I came back to find father had been taken. What was I to do? Lord Dover was a great nobleman, our only friend and he knew the King. He had invited father and me to the

protection of his house. He had rooms set apart for us. I had better go thither, he said. He would tell the King father was his friend and bring him to me. He was insistent—gave many reasons why for father's sake it was well I should be beneath his roof. I forced myself to go. What choice had I? "

She stopped for breath, and Devonshire walked across the room and fetched a chair for her. "Please sit down," he said.

"Let me finish." She put her hand on the back of the chair as she faced the two men.

"I had heard of Lord Dover's reputation. Father distrusted him from the first, Richardson told me about him. I thought perhaps he did not mean to harm me. I believed I could protect myself. I could not allow him to become lukewarm about father. If I were in his house, he would keep his promise. Perhaps he meant to; I do not know. When it was time to start this morning I was all in a jumble with fear at what I had done. I was quaking though I kept it from him. On the way he terrified me with his kindness. When Mr. Godwyn rode up I thought Lord Dover would kill him. It did not seem real—— "

Her words faltered, her knees became weak and she held on tightly to the chair to support herself. Devonshire with a quick step forward put his arm round her and led her to a sofa and propped her up with cushions.

"Eau de vie in the decanter on the sideboard, Robins."

"Please forgive me," she said weakly. "I am not very brave, I fear."

Devonshire's tone was deep and kindly. "Comfort yourself, you are with friends. As for braveness, Mistress Hardres, I would not wish to know a braver little woman. You must give me pardon for hurting you."

Colour came back to her after she had taken a sip of the spirit which Robins had brought from the sideboard.

"You'll help father?" she said.

"Your humble servant," replied Devonshire. "You shall see your father soon, for law is not yet a dead letter in this country. There may be quicker means."

"I thank God Mr. Godwyn brought me here."

"I am concerned for Mr. Godwyn, whose plight may likely be worse than your father's. I'll see my man; he's back by now and we'll hear of Dover."

"You thought Squire Godwyn betrayed Sir Valentine?" said Robins to the girl after Devonshire had gone from the room.

"When he was drunk. I never knew he drank. I can't believe the rancour in him now. My world has been turned upside down, Mr. Robins. To-day—why did he do this to-day?"

"You have been friendly with Mr. Godwyn?"

"He was a neighbour." She felt the warmth rushing to her cheeks.

"He never betrayed your father."

"Then why——"

"A villain of a brother—that's the secret or the main part of it."

Robins told the story and Edith Hardres listened with parted lips and head thrust forward. Robins' voice shook a little at the end. "Harry's no drunkard; you ought to have known that, Mistress Hardres."

"No drunkard," she repeated to herself.

"No chicken heart either, a fool about his brother."

"He did all this——"

"Not too good-humouredly; Harry has a temper."

"I cannot grasp it yet. He tried to help us. What he must have felt——"

"He's been through hell."

"I called him a wicked man, Mr. Robins."

"Some day when you see him you must take back the word."

"Yes, I must do that."

She suddenly buried her face in her hands and broke into a fit of sobbing which shook her from head to foot. She thrust her head into the cushions and Robins, bewildered and distressed, bent over her, patted her shoulder and tried to comfort her. "No need to cry. All's well now. Mr. Godwyn has strong friends. Don't cry, Mistress Hardres. You'll have your father very soon."

She gave no heed to him in her convulsiveness. Robins trotted over to the sideboard, for more of the eau de vie and when he returned glass in hand he found the paroxysm was subsiding. Her face was hidden, and now and then a gurgling sob came from her.

"Drink some of this."

She made an effort, raised herself and thrust aside the eau de vie.

"I'm giving you much trouble, but I couldn't help it. I'm better now."

She found a handkerchief and wiped her face.

"You're very tired."

"Lord Devonshire is a long time."

"He has been speaking with his servant in the hall. You'll take some of this? I'll put the glass by your side. Here comes his lordship."

Devonshire entered with his face telling of good news.

"Dover is not dead; little more than stunned. He is home by now. I stopped to write a letter to Pepys; Travers has taken it. I wait not for any legal process and

I hope that by to-morrow—you've been crying, Mistress Hardres?"

"She's heard about Squire Godwyn," said Robins.

"Surprises, eh?" Devonshire had a sympathetic smile.

"I am ashamed of my bad thoughts of Mr. Godwyn. I should have known——"

"His fault," said Devonshire crisply. "He shouldn't have lied to you. Look not so scared. I'm on his side; he has parts, your mad young countryman."

"What am I to do, my lord?"

"An hour or two of rest and refreshment here, I trust. The countess awaits you. Presently I send you back with proper escort to Knightrider Street. The linen-draper seems stout. I leave a man there for emergencies; we'll take no chance with Dover."

"There'll be no danger after this," said Robins.

"You don't know Dover," replied Devonshire.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SUPPER AT LOCKET'S

IT was six o'clock in the evening when Mr. Pepys, pursy and leisurely, in company with his friend, Sir Anthony Rivers, steered a way with his cane through the traffic by the Statue at Charing Cross towards Locket's tavern on the opposite corner. Evening was a quieter time at Locket's than afternoon, but at no hour till midnight was that popular meeting-place without its guests—officials from the Palace, officers of the guard, roystering young gadabouts, wits like Sedley and Hamilton, a sprinkling of hangers-on to whom a bottle of wine was a moderate price for curiosity or the chance of a rich acquaintance.

Pepys ran his eye round the common room as he and his companion entered. Three young equerries from the royal stables, gay in their scarlet coats and ribbons, were in loud chatter over their ale at the bar, two black-coated members from Westminster sat at a far table in quiet converse with a news-sheet in front of them, and a group of merchants or lawyers were by the lattice window, glasses in hand, chuckling at a story from one of their number. The Secretary to the Admiralty sighed his satisfaction.

"He who arrives before his time is as great a villain as he who comes too late."

"I discern the play's not fully acted out?"

"I usually sup at 'The Bull's Head' in Chandos Street; a slice of cold meat and a salad. The best buttered shrimps in town, and a place where one may avoid one's friends."

Sir Anthony Rivers clucked his tongue sympathetically.

"These sacrifices—here am I—and another to come, it seems."

"Mistress Locket may make amends."

"And I so pressingly invited!"

"A further proof of my affection. I'll give you leave to buy the wine. Here's Locket!"

Adam Locket, florid and cheerful, with a small blue apron to make manifest his rotundity, came bustling towards them, all regrets that they should have been standing for a minute unattended.

"You'll take supper above stairs, Mr. Pepys? Places are laid at the table where you dine, Sir Anthony."

"We'll sup below this evening, Locket, if Sir Anthony will allow. I see you have tables in the corner over there."

"You'll not be disturbed, Mr. Pepys? People in and out? Talk at the bar?"

"I expect a visitor within the hour. I'd not have him to miss me. You know Mr. Bolney?"

Adam Locket rubbed his hands together and smiled.

"Mr. Bolney? He used to be a regular. Here off and on these ten years past."

"Bolney?" cried Rivers.

"A casual encounter, Locket. Put him at the table next to us."

"Bolney," repeated Rivers, as they went over to their table.

"Part of the reason we are at Locket's. Dismiss the

good Bolney for the present. We have a more urgent affair."

He beckoned to their host, following behind them.

"Come hither, Locket, and listen carefully. My dinner this afternoon was almost without form and certainly without substance. Sir Anthony Rivers informs me that he, too, had little time or opportunity for proper sustenance. We wish a modest meal."

"Tasty, but not heavy," said Rivers.

"Oysters stewed in white wine to begin?"

Pepys' eyes lighted up. "A proper suggestion."

"There are two pigeons stuffed with green gooseberries ready for the roasting, if my wife would be persuaded."

"Divinest creature! I see too little of Mistress Locket. Make her my compliments."

"And mine," said Rivers.

"She's been in no good mood to-day."

"I hear no word amiss of Mistress Locket till we have had the oysters. We're supping frugally, but do I smell roast lamb a-doing? Rivers, we must not miss roast lamb!"

"Unforgivable. We are neither of us heavy eaters."

"And a Stilton cheese, Locket, full and ripe. Butter too, and bread with plenty of crust on it."

"A bottle of Alicante, Locket."

"Eh!" Pepys looked at his friend in surprise.

"Two bottles, Locket."

"My hearing gets bad," said Pepys, creasing his double chin as he made himself comfortable in his chair, when Locket had gone. Rivers laughed his apology.

"This knob-faced virago of Locket's—a trial for a cheerful man."

"She looks like a Gorgon but cooks like an angel,

and keeps the accounts. There are worse wives. Here he comes with the oysters."

"You prevailed on Mistress Locket," said Pepys, as he served himself and Rivers from the steaming dish.

"She sends her service to you, gentlemen. I am near to being forgiven by your message."

"Delicious!" Pepys held his spoon in the air.

"You must be good to this wife of yours," said Rivers.

"It was through Sir George Etheridge. I meant it as a joke. You know what women are, gentlemen."

"Etheridge, a dangerous man," said Pepys sedately, as he helped himself afresh from the oysters.

"Sir George owes us money. My wife sent him word if he did not pay, she would have the law of him. He gives a message to the man for my wife, and this was it; that if she stirred a step in the matter, he would kiss her. She was very wroth. She called for her scarf and hood, and when I tried to stop her, she stormed that she would see if there was any fellow alive would have the impudence. 'Prithee, my dear, don't be so rash,' said I. 'There's no telling what a man may do in his passion.'"

Rivers was taken with a sudden coughing. Pepys rested his spoon on the table and regarded Locket sternly.

"A dastardly thing to say, Locket."

"Not so bad as that, Mr. Pepys. She'll forgive me by bedtime."

"A handsome and attractive woman like Mistress Locket," said Rivers, recovering himself, "should be careful not to put temptation in the way of a rake-helly gallant like Sir George Etheridge."

"Tell her that," said Pepys. "Then you may bring us the pigeons."

The pigeons, when they came, were brown, savoury and plump, and Pepys stuck his fork into the breast of one of them to release the succulent gooseberry juice.

"You heard what passed at the Palace?"

"Fragments only. A gentleman in attendance does not push within earshot when Mr. Pepys talks with the King. Besides, your voices were low. A girl and her father, I noted that. A gracious monarch. A surprise —satisfaction!"

"You have the framework, Rivers. We'll not delay the pigeons."

Between mouthfuls Pepys told the story.

"Devonshire!" exclaimed Rivers.

"The man holds many threads. I put aside some dubiousness and went to Covent Garden, and found in place of politics a maiden in distress."

"I thought you atrophied long since, friend Pepys."

Pepys' face broadened, he dipped a piece of bread in the gravy and wiped his lips with a large red handkerchief.

"One is not senile at fifty-five, and if I had been eighty——"

"I never light upon these treasures," said Rivers, placidly, as he helped himself to wine. "Born unfortunate."

"The sweetest thing, eyes deep as indigo, a quick soft tongue, wavy hair that would mint guineas, the grace of Mistress Jennings, a natural little queen."

"Did Devonshire know the risks he took when he sent for you?"

"No one more pleased. Besides, the countess was there."

"Ah," said Rivers.

"I wonder at what age men lose their sense of charm

in women," remarked Pepys as he sliced cuts from the newly-arrived hindquarter of lamb.

"You may die early and never be enlightened."

"It was this way: the girl—she comes from the country—had caught the eye of Dover——"

"Ods! 'Twas he the King said——"

"Yes, I give you the beginning of it. Dover was on the road with her to Piccadilly when in the Strand some yokel of a lover who had followed her to town cracks him over the head, whips the girl to his pommel, and away he goes, heigho!"

"Brave lad!" said Rivers.

"A crush behind him, and in Covent Garden he drops her at Devonshire's house, and makes off on his good horse."

"Worth a ballad. How does the father enter?"

"Sir Valentine Hardres, a choleric old gentleman from Sandwich in Kent. He's behind lock and key for some disaffected word or so. Hales dislikes him. Devonshire makes it a favour that I should speak for him at the Palace and, indeed, 'tis a silly charge. I knew of Hardres when they elected me for Sandwich a year or two gone by. My part was cast for that of rescuer. You should have seen the girl's gratitude."

"Virtuous Pepys in place of villainous Dover," laughed Rivers. "How will she like the sequel?"

"Look not around you. Take some more of the lamb. Bolney has just come in."

There had been arrivals since Pepys and Rivers sat down to their supper, half a dozen of the tables were occupied and the bar was lined. Tobacco smoke made a cloud between the beams in the ceiling, the drawers were hurrying hither and thither with drink, the buzz of talk

and laughter was broken by snatches of a song by one of the young equerries.

Bolney threw the appraising look of a familiar over the gathering, and then passed slowly up to the bar, followed by his companion—a young man of careless gait, whose little black moustache indicated an indifference to fashion, albeit his coat was of modish cut and rings were on his fingers. Adam Locket came out to them from an opening in the bar.

"A welcome to you, Mr. Bolney. You neglect us nowadays."

"I am condemned to hospitality in many quarters, Locket. My friend and I desire supper."

"Above stairs or here? I can see you're quickly served if you stay below. A table is ready laid, next Mr. Pepys across the room there. He sups with Sir Anthony Rivers."

"Good company never hurt good supper. We'll play neighbours to Mr. Pepys. Now, Locket, to seriousness. Marinated herring to start. What after that?"

"A fricasse of chickens and rabbits is all but ready."

"Locket, you're inspired. Fricasse of chickens and rabbits it shall be. Cold veal pie as a side dish. What more can man desire? And, Locket, a bottle of Canary."

"I'd rather a pint of old ale for myself," said the young man.

"Old ale! It lies sour on the stomach at night. But as you will. Sir George Tachbrook is but lately from the country, Locket."

"I have the best old ale in Westminster, Mr. Bolney."

"I may try a second pint of it if it's as good as that," said Bolney's companion with a smile.

They had nearly reached their table when Pepys looked up in benevolent recognition. "I trust you are

well, Mr. Bolney. A year or more since I saw you—that was at Whitehall."

"I hear of you often, Mr. Pepys. Who does not? My service, Sir Anthony."

"We miss you at the Palace, Mr. Bolney," said the latter.

"Departed flavours deepen in the memory," Bolney bowed. "You'll forgive me. I act host to my friend here; he's from the country."

At the table Bolney seated himself so as to face Pepys, and then in the minute or so of waiting for the marinated herring he told his guest of the fame of Locket's tavern, its noted guests, the oddities of Adam Locket and his wife. Pepys and Rivers proceeding with their meal talked in undertones; other tables were within three yards of the group, and Pepys was by nature a cautious man, and Bolney had special reasons for discretion. It was when the newcomers were nearly through their fricasse that Pepys raised his glass and said genially, "Your good health, Mr. Bolney—and your friend's."

"The honour is ours, Mr. Pepys. To you and Sir Anthony. May I present Sir George Tachbrook of Norfolk?"

The young man raised his tankard, the other three their glasses, and Rivers, turning to drink the toast, took a look at the stranger.

"The Tachbrooks of Castle Rising are a family with a history," said Pepys.

"Sir George rests with the Earl of Devonshire; a cousin by marriage to the Countess," explained Bolney.

"But a month ago, Sir George, some mention of your name was made at Wills'," said Rivers. "'Twas understood you were abroad."

"We come and go, Sir Anthony."

"The climate of Holland——"

"Sir George touches no public matter," interrupted Bolney. "The earl entrusts Sir George with affairs, something of the management of Chatsworth. To-night he represents his lordship, carries to him information on a domestic interest if that information should be forthcoming."

The conversation was silenced for a minute by the din at the bar; one of the royal equerries was singing a song. In the applause at the end Pepys said, "I was able to hold the King with a story to-day, Mr. Bolney. I spoke warmly of the spirit and devotion of a certain lady, also of her beauty."

Tachbrook put down his tankard and leaned forward to hear the better.

"The King appreciates courage and brains in a woman. He was moved, also a little curious."

"A happy ending to your endeavours, I trust, Mr. Pepys."

"There might have been, but my pleading was uncalled for. I was anticipated. A friend had been before me."

Pepys' capacious face rolled in smiles at the astonishment in his listeners.

"When I came to the end of it the King said he had heard me through because of my description of the girl."

"You have good tidings?" said Bolney.

"Dover came down in a chair to the Palace this afternoon, assured the King there had been a mistake about the father, and obtained an order for his release."

"Dover has good points," said Bolney. "I'm glad I lent him a hand in the Strand."

Tachbrook had risen to his feet. "Dover sets Hardres free?" he said. "What means it?"

"Was ought else to be expected?" asked Rivers. "An ardent lover——"

"He'll pursue her still!"

Rivers lifted his eyebrows. "Why should he not?"

Bolney turned and pressed Tachbrook back to his seat. "I see Mr. Pepys has more to tell us."

"Dover can do nothing to harm the girl. The King wishes to see her. I am under command to arrange an audience."

"Indeed, you were eloquent," said Rivers.

"First Dover, then myself. His Majesty has a whim sometimes—a passing curiosity. It will protect her."

The singing at the bar began again and, under cover of it, Bolney spoke into Tachbrook's ear and the young man nodded and turned his attention to the song.

"A Soldier's Love is a Bottle of Wine.

A soldier's love is a bottle of wine,
Heigho, my lady.
No faithless maid makes him repine;
He cares not who her arms entwine,
So long as he has his bottle of wine,
A guinea to drink away the time,
A tavern, a horse, and a friend may be:

Laces and frills,
Saddle and sword,
Simpers and ankles,
Good bed and board.

A soldier's love is a bottle of wine,
Heigho, my lady.
Keep for others your eyes ashine,
Your twinkling toes, and petticoats fine.

I'll take you in my own good time,
But not while I have a bottle of wine.
Better than kisses, gifts benign,
A tavern, a horse, and a friend may be:

Laces and frills,
Saddle and sword,
Simpers and ankles,
Good bed and board."

The chorus was started a second time when Bolney, looking across the room, suddenly rose from his place.

"Time we were away, Sir George."

"By the Fates!" said Rivers, touching Pepys' arm.

Lord Dover stood within the door, a patch of plaster showing from beneath his hat, and Rivers had hardly spoken before he sighted the four and made across the room. Bolney and his companion were on the move, but Dover stopped them.

"I want you, Bolney," he said sharply, and then he turned to Pepys.

"An intrusion, Mr. Pepys; I hope I may be forgiven."

"You have missed an excellent supper, my lord, but are in time for a glass of wine."

Dover shook his head and smiled. "I trench upon your kindness in another direction."

He seated himself and pointed to his head.

"I had a fall this afternoon."

"The fellow has not been seized?" said Pepys.

"You get very near my mission, Mr. Pepys. I have no right to ask by what introduction you were led to make a request of the King to-day, and yet it would serve me."

"I knew Hardres when I was elected for Sandwich."

"I had forgotten it. You went to Harwich afterwards. Mistress Hardres recalled you?"

"The girl has sense."

"She's pursued by a young ruffian; he knocked me from my horse to-day. You've heard of it?"

"Love's way," said Rivers.

"I have to find him," went on Dover. "Mistress Hardres is not safe."

"Once you were young yourself, my lord—if all that's said is true—a fiery gallant," remarked Pepys.

"I was never a highwayman."

"Highwayman! I thought he was a farmer."

"Cover for the work. The Uxbridge road knows him well. There are a dozen cases against him—two of them worse than robbery. I do not wish him to be loose with Mistress Hardres as his quarry."

"Why fret about the man? Two months—next month—he'll be pistolled."

"I prefer to hang him."

Dover swung round on Bolney.

"You—what have you to say?"

"The kerchief with which I bound your head was a new one, my lord. I'll have it back at your convenience."

"Why did you hamper my servant, prevent him from getting to my side?"

"My lord, you devastate me. I thought he was in the plot. Wonder in truth I did not perforate him. I kept him from you of a purpose."

"You did, indeed. Now, sirrah, where is this man Godwyn?"

"Godwyn!"

"Trickster, do not play with me. Would you hide your connection with Cornwallis? Godwyn goes to

Cornwallis's house. You were with him in the Strand. Answer me."

Dover hardly parted his lips as he spoke his furious words; he sat rigid with one leg crossed over the other. He was heard by many; curious glances had followed him from the time he entered the tavern, and the noise at the bar had dropped to a murmur. Bolney held his head very upright, and coldness was on his face.

"I find your remarks unbecoming, my lord."

He lifted a finger to his companion and they began to move towards the door. Dover sprang up and was at the entrance before them, and his eye sought out the equerries. "Captain Dorley, to the guardhouse. A file here with all speed." The equerry left his friends at the bar, crossed the room and passed behind Dover out into the street.

"You'll make a passage or you'll fight for it, my lord."

Dover for all his calmness and contempt was surprised at the sight of the rapier in Bolney's hand. A middle-aged scrivener, forsooth! The man held his weapon as if he were used to it!

"I do not fight with menials."

"Give way then," cried Bolney, and he raised his point.

Dover's hand went over to his hilt and rested there. Had he to spit this fool?

"Do you seek death?" he said sternly.

"I seek a way to the street."

For the intaking of a breath the two men stood facing each other motionless, and the silent groups behind waited that first movement from one or the other which must bring tragedy in its train. Sir George Tachbrook pushed in front.

"What nonsense is this, Bolney? Put up your sword. My lord, I beg you to be patient. I have the information which you seek. I will not see a silly fellow peril himself."

"You! Who are you?" said Dover, searching his memory as to where he had heard the voice of this young fop before.

"He's Sir George Tachbrook," said Bolney, sheathing his blade; "but he has no warrant——"

"Do not interrupt. My lord, I know the whereabouts of this man Godwyn. You seem to have a right to it."

He retreated a couple of steps as though to get beyond earshot of Bolney, and Dover slowly followed him.

"A rough rascal, it seems, my lord."

Over Dover's shoulder he watched Bolney disappear through the doorway.

"You may spare me your opinion," said Dover. "Where is Godwyn?"

"A matter for your private ear, my lord." He was close to Dover now, rested his fingers lightly upon his breast to give the confidence.

"I want no whispers. Where is Godwyn?"

"Godwyn? Here is Godwyn."

He thrust with all his strength and Dover careened backward against a table amid a clatter of glasses, and as he strove to recover his balance Harry Godwyn leaped for the door.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TOM GODWYN AT THE CROSSROADS

TOM GODWYN swept the guineas from the table without counting them and thrust them carelessly into the outer pockets of his coat.

"Glad you're no worse hurt, my lord. No fault of mine."

"Your brother will pay his own debts," said Dover. "Put down your whip. I want a word with you."

Dover was without his usual arrogance; his tone was hard enough, yet near to that in which he would address an equal. For the time his scornfulness had disappeared. He took a slow turn up and down the room, while Tom Godwyn, seated on a corner of the table, swung his leg to and fro and asked himself what meant the change. A blow on the head had strange consequences, it seemed.

The pair were in a private room of the first floor of "The Cock" with the rumble of Fleet Street coming to them through the open window. The clock of St. Clement Danes across the way had just chimed noon; below stairs in the tavern was the clatter of the dinner hour, and the thought of the good meal which was in waiting intruded on Tom Godwyn.

"How long since you lived at your home in Kent?" asked Dover, coming to a halt in front of the young man.

" Years; back and forth in between, generally unwelcome."

" Your brother was no rolling stone? "

" More like a clod since father's death."

" People speak well of him in Kent."

" Country things for country folk. He's like a field of wheat or turnips."

" Your brother had an eye for Mistress Hardres? "

" No bad taste if he had, my lord. What say you? "

Dover showed no answering levity.

" I wish to know if he had touch with her at all—perhaps unknown to her father."

" 'T'would be but natural. I heard he was once seen gathering blackberries with her. None like rustics for gossip. If one time, why not another? "

" And fumed at her father the while! "

" You should know how little fathers count, my lord."

" You'll keep a civil tongue," said Dover with sudden harshness. " I'll have you understand I set a high regard by Mistress Hardres. You'll speak respectfully."

" The last few days were drumming in my head."

" You'll do as I say, and answer when I wish it, Godwyn, and go no further. I hired you, had no need for you in the affair, and have paid you well. I'll have no thoughts in you that play scandal with Mistress Hardres, nor any hint of it."

" I'm mum, my lord, none more mum than I. When you condescend to ask opinion of me you must allow I have a tongue."

" There is a limit. 'Tis needful I come down to you in talk but guard your words."

" I make bold to ask, my lord, if 'tis worth your effort. You have but to lift your finger and beauty flies

to you. She is only one. What matters? Besides, you face some danger."

"I face some danger, do I?"

"I'd not take my brother's side—not if the skies fell in, curse him—yet I know his cross grain. If he's set on this girl you'll have neither home nor safety. He'll worry you, he'll follow you. He'll shoot you in the face or from behind a hedge. He'll kill you like a weasel and keep on till he does it."

"Or till I kill him?"

"The plain alternative. I wonder if you'd gain by such."

"Eh?"

"If I were your friend, my lord, instead of a poor devil in your pay, I'd give you good advice."

"Speak your mind."

"You'll say it's guess work and it's little more, yet I'd put a guinea on it. Edith Hardres has met my brother in the lanes: he's mad for her and she, despite her father, has never had a hard word for him, so they say. A girl's fancies are hard to break. You're like to hear she has her fancies still, my lord. There's my advice."

"You make her a fool."

"Why did she not struggle when she might have got away from him?"

"A terror-stricken child; and he held her fast, I'll warrant. You've nothing more to tell me of them down in Kent?"

"No more than that she listened well whenever folks chanced to talk of him within her hearing. As for him——"

"The tribute of a hind. She would have a smiling word. She saw few men."

"I'll make free to press on you my good advice—keep to your own pastures. You'll risk no disappointment."

"You have no brains, Godwyn."

"I have a stomach though, and there's an entrancing smell of dinner coming up from down below," said Tom Godwyn, sliding off the table and putting straight his coat.

"I have not finished; you'll stay a while."

"I don't know that I will," said Tom Godwyn, very cool, with the clink of many guineas in his pocket. "I've given you what I know, not much regarded for it, and lost the middle cut of the loin of lamb. I doubt if we can serve each other more, my lord."

He began to move towards the door.

"Stay where you are!"

"I think not," said Tom Godwyn carelessly. "I'm tired of you, my lord."

"You'll wait my pleasure—robber, perjurer and roadman."

Tom Godwyn swung round with angry colour rising in his face.

"What's this you say?"

"I never employ a rascal and a villain without finding out all about him."

"Your guineas won't buy words like that."

"Fool; is Tyburn so far away? I need you. It's your good fortune."

"Would you rat on me?"

"I lift my hand and you kick for breath."

"What would you?" asked the young man fiercely.

"You'll answer me patiently, for your own advantage. You say the half of this farm in Kent belongs to you?"

"You know it."

"Why not the whole?"

"The whole?"

"Has your brother made a will?"

"If so, I'll get neither stick nor stone."

"Wills may be broken."

"Harry is much alive."

"I look to the future."

"He'll live a hundred years, will Harry; he's that sort."

"About yourself—you're in my way, Godwyn."

"I've no longing for your company, my lord, I've said so."

"You have too close a likeness to your brother. You've been abroad before?"

"What whim's this? Abroad, you say?"

"You have to disappear. 'Tis not from benevolence, but because I wish to put my hand upon another who resembles you."

"I wasn't near the Strand when Harry knocked you from your horse. I have proof. Moreover, we're to be told apart by those who know us."

"You'll go abroad, but not for that. Your brother is wanted for taking fifteen guineas from Squire Potteridge in the Uxbridge Road six weeks ago."

"Squire Potteridge—why I——"

"There's testimony that at Hounslow a week later he stopped the coach of Sir Timothy Branker, put a bullet through the coachman's arm and was only sent flying by the ready pistols of the old gentleman."

"Candour, truly. You'd make yourself disliked by some, my lord. I suppose I must be thankful that 'tis summer, and a passage to Holland likely to be smooth."

Dover folded his arms across his breast and took a look at the young man—his flushed face, his sullen

eyes, his hat awry, his left hand striking at boot with his riding whip.

"Holland or France; it matters little. There is but one way you might save the journey."

"An irksome way, I'll swear, before I hear it."

"Your brother is in hiding, has put on other clothes most likely—you'd know him if you saw him?"

"He could never have disguise from me, brother Harry."

"Cornwallis's servants are under scrutiny. You might know his friends or be able to discover them—his habits, some particular coffee-house or tavern. You'd know his horse—he's sure to keep his horse. You have comrades who, for a guinea, might find some news of him by methods of their own."

"He's given you the slip?"

"I'll find him; he can't escape for long, but I wish my hand upon him quickly. In this you may give service."

"I? I know not where he lies. Moreover, where's my profit in it?"

"If you could help me find him to-day—to-morrow, you'd be Squire of Ash the sooner. You'd have another hundred guineas in your pocket. It would not then be needful that you should go abroad."

"Another hundred guineas!"

"The farm is yours by rights as well. You have your chance; you'll never have another."

"I hate the thought of France or Holland."

"You have more to think of."

"What would you do with him?"

"The law would be upheld."

Tom Godwyn's face went blank.

"You'd do that?"

" The highwayman from the Uxbridge Road is due to hang."

" They might take me instead of Harry. Is that your meaning? "

" I'd not try to save you. Once seized 'twould suit me better you should swing."

" One or the other of us? "

" One or both."

" One or both," repeated Tom Godwyn slowly. He put on his hat. " My lord, you shall have the truth of it. Many a time I've wished my brother dead and shall again. Belike I'll kill him someday. But what you ask is straight from hell, and there's my answer."

Dover showed no annoyance: his voice was cold.

" Any value in you Godwyn is expended. I have no use for weaklings. You'd best make your way to Rochester this afternoon; a fishing boat to-night, to-morrow at the latest. I give you no assurance meantime."

* * * * * *

Some three hours afterwards his preparations for travel had been completed, Tom Godwyn sat in the back parlour of " The Lamb and Flag," sharing a bottle with old Villikens, the host, and cursing the fact that nightfall was so far delayed.

" We'll not see you soon again, Captain Night? "

" Months, it may be years. I'm sick of England."

" I doubt not ye have your reasons," said Villikens, who never asked confidences from his guests, and only occasionally received them.

" They're after me; I can tell you that. That's why I wait for dark. You'll keep your mouth shut when I'm gone."

" They've been before. What did they ever get? "

Villikens gave a senile grin.

" Any of my friends, that's different. I've no time for good-byes."

" I'll pass the word. Will't have another bottle? 'Tis the last time."

" As you will. I'm sick of waiting."

He tramped about the room.

" This mouse-trap of a parlour, Villikens! All I'll see of London for a good time, perhaps ever. Hours yet."

" Here's to your luck."

" And yours. Is my horse ready? "

" All ready with his saddle on."

" Villikens, I'll not be prisoned this last hour or so."

" Best not go out, if so be that they're after you."

" The gaming-house in Long Acre is but round the corner."

" They search such places sometimes."

" My luck is not so bad as that. I'll have one last look. 'Twill cheer me up. If I stay here I'll be too drunk to ride."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A LADY'S CHAMBER

HARRY GODWYN and Bolney pulled their sweating horses to a walk as they entered the quietness of Gray's Inn Road with the escapade best part of half an hour behind them.

"Dover saw our whisking tails as we went past the Statue. I took a squint backwards at him in the doorway. A disappointed man, Harry. Outspoken words to that laggard file!"

"This tavern at Marylebone, you can trust them?"

"'The Crowing Rooster' has always been a useful place for us just out of London. We often send our friends there. Johnson who holds it used to be butler to Cornwallis, and he's in touch with Lincoln's Inn each day or so."

"How long can we keep cover?"

"If the hunt is up I'll skip to Holland. You'd best come too. You'll need no telling where you stand after all that's happened."

"I am highwayman, it seems."

"One of two."

"There's only one highwayman."

"You for certain—you must sleep light of nights. As for your brother he's in the way, unless he's of some new service, which I doubt."

"One's danger is the other's safety, surely."

"With Dover! Harry, I'd risk my town mansion if

I had one that you may wear a piece of black for brother Tom before the week is out. Dover has not been mollified to-night."

"Tom has given Dover help."

"A sentence on him, and I reckon Tom is unawares. Thank God, I've not a brother."

In the big front bedroom of "The Crowing Rooster" Harry learned that a passage from Harwich to Holland could be obtained once and sometimes twice a week—depending on the weather. Cornwallis had made arrangements with care and in advance; it was his custom. The names of the fishing boats were the "Alice" and the "Poppy"; they had taken over many in the last four weeks.

"It looks the only way, and I'll have a good companion."

"A very sick one. The sea's no friend to me. I'm a man without fear, Harry, with two exceptions, a sailor's occupation and the toothache."

"What's to do when I get to Holland?"

"Leave that to me and to Cornwallis. What's to do if you stay here?"

"Money must be found."

"To-morrow I'll devise to meet Robins—not at Lincoln's Inn."

"I hate to be driven off so suddenly like this and by false accusers too, but 'tis wiser I should go with you."

"Thank Heaven we have an exit."

"I leave much behind me."

"I've been in love four times; I know the feeling. Mistress Hardres in the day time, Mistress Hardres in your dreams at night. You can dream of her in Holland, Harry."

"Not a thought of Mistress Hardres, if you'll believe

me. Harvest is coming on. Thirty acres of good wheat, ten of barley. There's five acres of turnips to be hoed between whiles. We're short of men; when I'm away it makes a difference. Tomlyn may sell the heifers; he knows not my mind on them. Two sows are due to farrow in a month. Bridget has not calved yet."

"Your pardon, Harry; I thought you worried on the girl. More serious, I see. Maybe the corn, and the pigs, and the cows will grow along without you."

"Not to be lightly granted though 'tis possible," laughed Harry. "You have a townsman's heart. Wait till you own some acres. But you have reason, Bolney. These hours in London I've sown a different kind of crop."

"Indeed you're right, Harry, and thistles at that."

"Mistress Hardres will have a trying hour or so, no worse. She's safe because she knows the truth."

"She's with her father, and what more is there to wish? Dover's changed his front, having smelled out danger. He'll put a face on it."

"Pepys said the King was to see her, and Dover is a friend of James. An awkward meeting for her with all that's gone."

"I hope she'll make speedily for Kent and never see the Palace. James is very human now and then."

"What's your meaning? You never think——?"

"He's no old Rowley, but I'd not say he was plaster white. Pepys has stirred him with a tale of her high spirit, and he fancies clever women. He's been known to lighten his royal duties——"

"You have a foul imagination, Bolney. The King protects her. He's near to being an old man."

" 'Twas but a passing thought. There's many speak well of him."

" What of her father? There's Devonshire, not to mention Pepys."

" I was long at Whitehall and got the habit of believing no pretty woman went there and left unscathed, however good she was."

" There'll be one at least."

" I see the farm is not so utterly possessing. I'll raise no more ghosts. We've enough substantial things to face."

The sun was shining next morning, cocks crowing in the yard, milk buckets rattling in the kitchen when Harry Godwyn, after a full nine hours' sleep, came down to find Bolney at the open door of the stable mending a bridle strap and talking to the ostler.

" I'm to be a busy man to-day and you a lazy one, Harry. Here Rennet! hang this bridle on the stall post. I'll want the grey in half an hour."

" A lazy man! I'm fit for anything—think well of Holland. That good bed has worked marvels."

They walked to a tree-trunk, dislodged adventurous chickens, and found a seat.

" Rennet, the ostler here, took a message into town last night for Robins. He meets me to-day at Highgate at the home of Staples, the brewer, a friend of his. It's best I keep away from London. Robins will have commissions for me, and he brings money for our journey."

" Can I not come with you? "

" I know not what Robins plans, whom I have to see. You might be some encumbrance, for you're no mascot just at present, Harry—Dover's surely on the prowl. I may not be back till nightfall."

" I don't stomach a day's waiting."

" You've the pigs and cows in Kent to deal with."

" Aye, I'll write to Tomlyn—my first letter to him and I've known him all my life."

" Make your harness trim, see to your pistols and keep close to the inn. You'd do well to watch arrivals from London."

" I wish my brother Tom, like us, was on his way to Holland."

" Tom in Holland! The Lord preserve us from it. I'll give him France and all the rest of Europe. Not Holland, Harry."

" It looks as if he's doomed for a bad ending but I loathe to think that Dover should trap him following this affair."

" If Tom's an eel, can slip away, he may escape."

" You don't know Tom. He'll take the money; there's an end on it. He'd never give a backward thought to Dover with guineas in his pocket."

" Such rogues usually are blest by fortune."

" If he had a word of warning——"

" Who's to give it, I'd like to know? "

" He has quarters at ' The Lamb and Flag ' in Rose Street, Covent Garden."

" Harry, I've known you but a day or so, but you're a man of my own kidney, and I'd serve you where I could."

" I've strong cause to be grateful to you, Bolney."

" But I'll not go near ' The Lamb and Flag ' to-day. Warn Tom indeed! "

" A messenger might leave some word——"

" It's out of reason. Tom's here and there, a needle in a haystack. We might damn ourselves; your brother is not a man to trust."

" I couldn't expect it, I suppose."

" By Heaven, Harry, you have two enemies, and your brother's one of them."

" Tom's bad; I doubt if he's as bad as that."

After Bolney had ridden away on his mission to Highgate, Harry Godwyn kicked his heels in the yard of " The Crowing Rooster " for an hour, then wrote his letter to Tomlyn, and filled up the time till dinner by repairing a broken saddle flap, and all the while the impulse rose in him.

It was late afternoon when Harry set out on the walk to London, not without misgivings about Bolney, and intention for a return which should forestall censure on the risk. The by-ways were not known to Harry, and the walk to Covent Garden was further than he had imagined; evening had come by the time he was at " The Lamb and Flag " to be exasperated by the evasions of old Villikens about the absent Tom. At last he had the truth as much by his likeness to " Captain Night " as by his threat to strangle Villikens for another minute of delay. He went round to Long Acre at his fastest stride.

Harry Godwyn found the porch of the gaming-house without its usual loungers—losers waiting for their winning friends, a cheerful couple recounting their spoils, fashionables from the coffee-houses, " Jenny Man's " or " The Royal " kicking their heels for belated acquaintances.

A squabble at one of the tables had drawn all idlers, and Harry could hear the high words of disputants, the shuffling of feet, the mixture of oaths. He stood wavering, cursing the ill-luck of the disturbance; then mustered his courage, pushed open the door and went in.

It took a second or two for Harry to get the meaning

of the disordered scene. Some of the tables were overturned, all the players were at the other end of the room circling round a struggling group in which was a glint of scarlet uniforms. Imprecations, denials, exclamations, mounted high, and as the writhing mass steadied itself and opened out, Harry's heart gave a great jump for there was Tom Godwyn, hatless, with hair in disarray, his wrists held by a soldier on each side. An officer, pistol in hand, stood in front of him; four soldiers were thrusting back those who crowded on the prisoner.

"You'll pay for this," gasped Tom Godwyn; "I'm not the man you want."

"You're his other self then," said the officer. "You remember we supped together in the mayor's house at Sandwich. Where's that groom from Canterbury?"

A wizen-faced little man squeezed forward out of the crush.

"It's the squire all right. I've see'd him on market days."

"Bring him along, boys. Clear away there."

"I tell you it's my brother you want, not me," shouted Tom Godwyn as the group began to move. "Plenty of people know me, Lord Dover knows me. I can get others——"

He perceived the solitary man standing at the door.

"Look! If you want Harry Godwyn there he is!"

"By the good Lord," said Singleton.

The groom was gazing thunderstruck.

"He's right enough. Like as two peas they be."

"Come on," cried Singleton.

Harry Godwyn sped through the porch, swearing at himself for his delay short as it had been, and before he had covered twenty yards he heard the soldiers in the

street behind him. Their heavy riding boots did not help them but Harry knew he would need good luck to get away from such a chase. The soldiers were raising shouts, and many had joined them; one busybody had already tried to stop the fleeing man, to be thrown headlong to the gutter.

Inspiration came to him at the sight of St. Martin's Lane. A woman busy with brush and dustpan at her doorstep straightened her back at the commotion of the crowd pouring round the corner from Long Acre.

" Mistress Dorothy Laden; she lives in St. Martin's Lane? " said Harry breathlessly.

" Be they after her? What for? "

" Which is her place? "

" Third house, one with the green door. If so be——"

Harry Godwyn flew along to the green door, rapped loudly, tried the latch, and sighed his thanks to Heaven as the door gave in to him. Night was falling, but his pursuers were near enough to see his entry, mark the house, and he spun round on his heel, ignoring the startled serving maid who stood, candle in hand, at the foot of the stairs, and lifted the heavy wooden bar to its sockets across the door.

" I'm no thief," he said; " some men are after me. I bear a message to your mistress from Lord Dover."

" Lord Dover! Is he——"

" Take me to her."

They mounted the stairs to the first floor and the girl went to a door. From below in the street came the sound of knocking and a turmoil of voices.

" I'll tell her——"

" No time for that."

He pushed by, drove open the door, and stood in the presence of Dorothy Laden, a tall erect figure of surprise in a blue silk gown.

She looked older, tear-marks were on her face, her cheeks had hollows in them.

On a chair near her were hood and cloak to match her gown, and Harry had time to guess she had just come in from out of doors.

" Mistress Laden, can you hide me? "

" Godwyn! "

" They're after me because of Dover. 'Twas I who struck him down."

He saw her eyes dilating.

" They're clamouring at the door, madam. Perhaps there is a stairway to the roof."

" It was you who struck him on the head and knocked him from his horse. You ruffian, you assassin! "

" Why, Madam——"

" You might have killed him, you murdering fiend! You come to me to hide you, do you! "

She laughed hysterically, then hurried to the window overlooking the street and groped for the catch.

CHAPTER TWENTY

"MASTER QUICKSWORD"

"WHERE is he?"

Captain Singleton was the first across the threshold when the door fell open, and the hallway was quickly filled with the soldiers, while outside a score or more of those who had followed the chase chattered among themselves expectantly, and craned forward for a view. By the wall on the further side of the opened door was a figure in blue silk cloak and hood, dimly seen in the gloom, holding the wooden bar which she had withdrawn to let the soldiers in. She waved her hand frantically towards the stairs.

As soon as the last of the soldiers was on the bottom step Mistress Laden dropped the wooden bar, and walked with alacrity through the doorway into the street. Her hood was pulled well over her face and she gave no heed to the questions which some in the waiting group flung at her. She pushed her way through hurriedly and went off towards Charing Cross followed by inquisitive eyes. One of the onlookers, Hilary Skelton by name, a messenger in the Ordnance Office, who had long admired Mistress Laden in secret, and dreamed of adding her to his list of modest conquests, was moved to the use of the opportunity. Beauty in distress! He was a dapper little man, and wine, unusual luxury, had accompanied his supper. He had to make an effort to keep up with the silent fugitive.

"Will madam permit me to bring her a chair from the Strand?"

A smothered sob was his only answer. Mr. Hilary Skelton was touched; poor frightened lady, withal so elegant; and as they turned the corner of Chandos Street by St. Martin's Church, he thrust his hand gently beneath her arm encased in blue silk, and he was surprised to find what a lusty arm it was. Then, apparently overweighted by her feelings, Mistress Laden came to a stand in a doorway, and the next instant, Mr. Hilary Skelton, boasted breaker of women's hearts, with a record marked by a few rebuffs, received the most horrific and devastating surprise of his life. The one he sought to protect—the stricken dove—snatched her arm free from his grasp, and dealt him a blow on the face which sent him sprawling out into the middle of the road. He only got to his feet again in time to see the blue silk cloak disappearing round the corner on the right in the turning which led down to the Strand.

Harry Godwyn knew that Dorothy Laden's cloak, long as it was, did not conceal his boots, and in all the fever of him, with nerves a-stretch for the first sound of his pursuers, he wondered what the lighted Strand might think of a lady without a skirt. He had no time for hesitation. The beginning of an indistinct uproar behind him told that the capsized cavalier in Chandos Street had given guidance to the soldiers and the crowd. Not for long would he be out of sight. He plunged across the Strand to where a sedan chair rested before a fruiterer's shop, and was inside it so quickly that the bearers, gossiping at ease as they leaned against the wall which flanked boxes of oranges, saw no more than the flicker of a lady's cloak as he drew the curtains. How had she come from the shop without their notice? As

quick with her feet as she was with her tongue! A brocaded arm appeared and made an onward gesture, and a harsh voice cried, "On, on!"

Within the shop the Countess of Dorchester placing some foreign fruit in a basket did not observe the absence of her chair for nearly a minute, and then with a strong word hurried to the door.

"The miscreants have gone!"

"'Twas my lady's chair in waiting?" asked the shop owner.

"Fool, do I bring a coach at this hour? I see them passing Villiers Street. Drunk, I suppose—the unwashed scullions! Boy, bring the basket."

"A lady took the chair."

"A lady, eh? I'll lady her!"

She set off vigorously along the Strand, and was within hailing distance at the Royal Mews. She had to shout twice before she was heard. The chair was deposited at the entry to Cockspur Street by two bewildered bearers.

"Wittols, rascals!"

"Sakes, my lady, I thought you were inside," said one of the pair.

"You sixpence snatchers, were you not told to wait?"

"As true as there's a Heaven, my lady——"

"Out she comes! Cat's nouns, do I stay all night?"

The curtains parted, the flap swung back, and there stepped forth a young man in homespun without a hat. He bowed in a mannered way.

"Wounds! Who are you? What masque is this?"

"I beg you to forgive the men, madam. The fault's mine. I took the chair believing it for hire, and stepped in hastily. They must have thought they had their patron. Permit me to relinquish——"

"They said you were a woman."

"He was a woman," said the elder of the bearers.

"Silence, weevil! Give me the lantern."

She took the light and held it up.

"I've seen your face before, sir. Where was it? You must know me. Holy skies, it's really so!"

"At your command," said Harry, trying his best to recall her.

"How now, Master Quicksword! Do you make a practice of stealing ladies' chairs?"

Her shrewishness had melted to amazement and laughter; an adventure to her taste!

"Mistress Sedley!"

"You've grown handsome, man. Why did not Master Quicksword come to see me? La, la! Where's your compliments? I'll swear you're scared for once!"

He took a step close up to her.

"Madam, I have to speak quickly, and may make another blunder. Your chair was the saving of me. I'm followed. Those who wish me harm are in the Strand."

She took one comprehensive look at him, reached to the hem of her dress for some money and gave it to the bearers.

"Be off, the couple of you, numskulls, this is a friend of mine. Let one word of this escape, and I'll see you whipped till you howl. Understand me. No whisper of it. Scurry!"

"Aye, my lady."

They went off at obedient speed, well out of a troublesome mystery, and later at "The Flying Greyhound" they sold a blue silk cloak and hood for three sixpences and a gallon of beer.

"Who are your enemies? Why are you pursued?" asked the Countess.

"Yesterday I injured Lord Dover."

"You! You're the one who did that? I heard it was a countryman. Did ever like befall!"

"They're soldiers; they may come in this direction, madam."

"You'll take my arm. So! Now for St. James's Square; it's where I live. An excitement to see you, Master Quicksword, and after what you've told me, I'm near to loving you."

She set a good pace along Cockspur Street, and her ears and eyes were as sharp as her companion's.

"Not that they'd touch an escort of Catherine Sedley's, but they'd know your whereabouts."

The redbrick house in St. James's Square surprised Harry Godwyn by its size, no less by its appointments. A manservant in scarlet attended at the door, another laid supper for two in a room which had a harmony in its delicate grey hangings and silver candelabra. The chairs were cushioned in a neutral velvet, the foot sank softly into a carpet which had a tint of blue. The walls found opportunity for three paintings only, one of James, another of the countess in her earlier days, and a third of a plump-faced courtier whom Harry guessed to be her father, Sir Charles Sedley.

She laughed as she placed the young man in a chair.

"I'll answer your unspoken question before I set you talking! Why should the Countess of Dorchester go forth at night to purchase fruit? I have a friend who has a passion for the sweet-scented succulent pineapples which come at intervals from the Barbadoes—costly, too. Bolsover, in the Strand, who keeps open late for revellers, informs me when he has some from a ship.

They are quickly sold, and there are never many at a time. Bolsover had six come to him this evening. Now, are you answered, Master Quicksword? Much energy to get some fruit, think you? If the Queen had paid some thought to pineapples, she'd have been a better wife. I see your modest struggle for the proper word. Here's the food to save you. And now I'll have your name. I can't call you Master Quicksword all the time."

"I'm Harry Godwyn, a country squire from down in Kent."

"Ods, bods! You're different from the squires I've met. Corpulent, with greasy chins. Also they smell of beer."

Harry smiled.

"I cannot say what age may do for me."

"Not that, I'll swear."

Within an hour the Countess of Dorchester knew most of what Harry Godwyn had to tell, and suspected the remainder. She interrupted many times with knowing questions. She crackled with laughter at the story of Dorothy Laden. "Gagged her and tied her to the bedpost. Pity you hadn't time to thrash her, the vixen. I always hated her—feathers like a peacock and brains like a hedgehog. Coarse also. Coarse women irk me. What did you do with the serving maid?"

"Pushed her into a bedroom and turned the key."

"I can see the soldiers freeing Laden. She's talking yet."

Harry in scanty words described his brother—a young daredevil ready fashioned for Dover's use.

"He's actually a road robber?" said the countess keenly.

"Who's to tell?"

"What's his use to Dover unless he is? Why in the name of twenty saints you should have lied for him ——"

She threw up her hands.

On Cornwallis the countess was incisive. "A clever old fox; I know about him and why he is in Holland! I'll forgive him—short of bringing William overseas. As for Bolney——"

"I hope you'll say no hard word of Bolney."

"Why should I? A shiftless creature, but almost a man of parts. Bolney tried to kiss me not five years since."

She laughed at Harry's startled look.

"Ambitious person. One to be discouraged. But for the talk that fountains from him, Bolney would be interesting. In hiding you say?"

"Waits for me to-night to flee with him to Holland."

"You'll find quills and paper and ink on that table in the corner. That is, if you can trust my groom with where he is."

"You could hang me with a quick word, madam. I'll engage for Bolney's neck as well."

He went over to the table, and wrote a note and gave it to her. "I wished him luck in his journey."

"Bolney will have a kind of luck; he always does. Pipes and tobacco are on the shelf behind the window seat. I go to see the man who rides with this."

She came back with a nod of satisfaction, found a chair with extra cushions in it, and perched her feet up on a stool to display gay and dainty shoes. She pointed at them. "Scarlet like my liveries, which have annoyed at least six people. The royal colour. I have a better right to it than many."

"I'll defend any colour you may choose to wear, Madam."

"That sounded like my Master Quicksword. Now, listen. Dover means you ill—only partly by reason of the blow you gave him. I've heard your story. He's jealous of you with the girl."

"He has no cause."

"Poof! I detest the man, but he's not all bad. He's stout for the King. He's not ungenerous with his guineas to an impoverished acquaintance. He'd face a lion in fight. But where a woman is concerned he'd stab his dearest friend asleep to get her."

"What purpose has he now?"

"This buttercup lass and her old idiot of a father—he'll use their audience with the King. He'll smooth them over."

"They may be civil, madam, seeking no outbreak, but they'll never be deceived by him again."

"Make not too sure. He has many weapons. Meanwhile, you are to be brushed aside, wafted up to Heaven. He's right to be jealous—though she never casts a look at you."

"Once away from London I'll be free from him."

"Not if you run to Kent where this girl is. He'll root you out. He has the means. Your village justices for highway robbery—he'll not rest on them. Soldiers are to his hands—fresh charges if he needs them. Oh, I know Dover."

"You bring Holland nearer."

"I've a better scheme—one to spite him. The King has saved old Hardres; he shall save you, squire. He has but to know the facts. There is one who'll tell them well and clearly, not later than to-morrow."

"I know you are in retirement, madam. I put a

task on you. The ear of His Majesty, and so soon?"

"My gallant squire—why bought I pineapples to-night?"

"I meet good friends. You make me very grateful for your kindness, madam."

"Why, man, you're a gift to me. The week has been a dull one. I'll enjoy to-morrow as much as I've enjoyed to-night."

"You conceal the favour, making it the deeper."

"Squire, you're not meant for rickyards. Stop these soft speeches—though I like 'em, mark you. I have to think of what's to happen. You'll rest here the night—your room's in readiness. At a fitting hour to-morrow I go to Whitehall—in my coach this time, not in a chair. I'll tell the King what's right that he should hear. Believe me, squire, despite all gossip James has justice in him, and a good heart. He'll mew up his mouth over Dover—he never deserts a friend, let him be ever such a scoundrel. But he'll send for you—I'll bring back the summons. Once you have seen the King and been frank with him, you can return to Kent without any fear of Dover's enmity and be the happy squire again. One day I'll come and visit you in your hayfields."

"Brook House will never see more welcome visitor."

"I'll say it again—you were not meant for rickyards, squire."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE KING AND EDITH HARDRES

THE four cream horses making a clatter with their glittering harness, the trotting footmen by the side, the lumbering crimson coach behind—came round the corner from Pall Mall into St. James's Square at last, and Harry Godwyn, who had been watching from the window for an hour, got up from his seat, rubbed his leg to relieve a touch of cramp and was thankful that suspense was over. He went to the hall to observe servants at the entrance ready to usher in their mistress with established ceremonial.

Harry caught a sight of her as the coach door opened, and he was conscious of a change. She had gone forth armed for conquest, light-hearted and determined. Now she was pale, her eyes had lost their lustre, and though her head was tossed back, there was something listless in her air; enthusiasm had departed from her. In any other woman it might have been fatigue.

As she alighted the footman moved the step an inch too far and caused her to trip, and she turned and dealt him a slap on the face which sent him reeling. The housekeeper who had been waiting in the hall for instructions as to the hour for dinner thought it wiser to ask no question.

The Countess walked straight to Harry.

"Come to the withdrawing-room, Mr. Godwyn."

He followed her in and she dropped into a chair.

"The King will see you."

"Your task has been troublesome, madam?"

" Aye, troublesome enough. The door is on the crack; go, shut it. Then come and sit down."

He fastened the door, and drew up a chair in front of her; a dozen fears were rising in him.

" Yes, he'll see you, and I doubt not you'll win free from Dover unless you are unlucky."

" I could not hope for certainty."

" A trembling bit of a thing that girl of yours! "

" You've seen her? "

" Seen her, yes, and wellnigh forgotten her. No, I'll not say that. She has no interest for me. Even you are less important to me than you were. Don't blink at me like an owl. Did I not speak to the King for you? "

" More than I had a right to hope for," said Harry, reddening.

She sat with her chin on her hand looking past him. " I am not myself this morning, Mr. Godwyn," she said at length; " you'll bear with me."

" I've proved a burden, madam."

" I went to a discovery and I'm displeased."

" If my absence would lighten——"

" No, no, I need you—I think I do. Besides you're wanted at the Palace and I go with you. The news about yourself—two sentences will tell it. The King's persuaded of your worthiness, and but sees you to give colour to a pardon for the clout bestowed on Dover. The twists and turns, they matter not."

" You can work wonders, madam."

" Deliverance, Mr. Godwyn—if you'll take it! "

" If I'll take it? "

" The King's been moved, I grant you that. How and why is some concern to me and perhaps to you. You're not through the wood, Mr. Godwyn. I said if

you were not unlucky. Suppose I asked you to meddle further in this business. Then, indeed, you'd be unlucky, for how could you refuse? "

"I'd make no wry face about it."

"I'll swear you wouldn't, Master Quicksword," said the countess with a passing smile.

She drew herself up straight and reflected.

"Men, Mr. Godwyn, saving your presence, are foul and fickle creatures. Not always, some for an hour or two a year, and some all their lives. They say James doesn't like a pretty face. Fools! He's a man."

Harry was sitting as upright as herself.

"What would you tell me? "

"I went in on them—they were taking up the time that should be mine. James bore it well enough—presented me. Righting an injustice, so he said. Oh, he was very pleasant. Hardres, the imbecile, was melted. A loyal subject henceforth. The pineapples received a nod. His Majesty had fresher fruit for his attention. Talked with the girl like an old friend, patted her shoulder, was full of smiles. Graciousness itself. He'd have pardoned Titus Oates, let alone Squire Godwyn. All in my presence, take heed."

"Perhaps, madam, you were deceived. Mistress Hardres is a young girl who has had painful days on account of her father. In your anxiety——"

"My jealousy, you mean. You may call it so. But I have brains and cannot be deceived in James. Nature never made him a dissimulator. I know his smile of admiration. His voice is different when a woman moves him. His gestures, the furrow in his forehead, his nervous hands are all signs when the moth has been attracted to the light. He's seized with a sudden stupid fancy for this country lass."

"He'd never dare, madam. I cling to it you're mistaken."

"The girl will reach no harm. Annoyance, perhaps. I have a plan in mind to lessen her annoyance, not for her sake but for mine."

"She has her father."

"Far more important, she has me. I wish your help. Are you afraid?"

"I have a great affection for Mistress Hardres," said Harry soberly, "I have no interest so great, nor will I ever have."

"And I no thought for her at all," said the countess bitterly. "I fight for myself."

"I would serve you too if I could, madam."

"I choose to kick against the pricks. My pride alone—that he should serve me so! All women should be drowned at middle age, at thirty or before. You'll let me command you, Mr. Godwyn?"

"With all willingness."

"I've hope 'tis but a fancy for a day with James. I'm a fool like other women. Mr. Godwyn, the King is available to you either this afternoon or to-morrow morning. I take you to the Palace this afternoon."

"The audience is to be harder for me than I thought."

"I warrant His Majesty will hear from you nothing but what is right and necessary."

"I can but do my best. I am thinking all the while of Mistress Hardres."

"That you should see the King quickly is for Mistress Hardres's happiness and for mine."

"You keep some point from me still."

"I am captain for to-day," said the countess.

They went off in the coach together at four o'clock, Harry spruce within the limits of his wardrobe. He wore a new hat; his boots and shoes were well cleaned, and the countess had found a plain lace band for the top of his coat. He had no wig, but his own hair was comely and well-tended and tied with a neat black bow.

"My gallant is presentable," said the countess, regarding him sideways as they sat in the coach.

"I wish I were well through with it, madam."

"No soldier's word that, Master Quicksword. What's this to you after all that's gone?"

"I'm no courtier."

"A bow, silence till he speaks to you, and then straight answers. Good Lord, Mr. Godwyn, you're not frightened of the King. I thought you held with Devonshire and company?"

"That makes it worse."

"A queer man, you are," said the countess.

The coach passed between sentries whose blue ribbons marked them as grenadiers, into the courtyard at Whitehall, alive with afternoon activity. Young officers in gay uniforms paced up and down in talk together, a yeoman-rider was in the open with saddled horses champing their bits and tossing their heads, messengers on foot were coming and going, an armourer with a bundle of rapiers under his arm had stopped for a word with a youthful-looking trumpeter, at the far end of the courtyard attendants were round a coach harnessed to glossy bays. If James was tottering on his throne no mark of it was here.

The arrival of the countess's coach made little stir; those in its passage moved to one side, others spared a glance for a second or two. As the coach drew up at the door, two servants, the scarlet of whose livery

matched that of the countess's own footmen, came forth with obeisances, and a sentry ceased his gossip with a page and stood in respectful erectness. All coolness and authority was the countess.

"Turn and wait by the banquetting hall," she said to the coachman. She walked back a few steps. "You, Titchmarsh, keep Mr. Godwyn's horse here at the door. He will leave in advance of me."

"My horse!" exclaimed Harry.

"I had it fetched from Marylebone this morning. I may need your place in the coach for another on my return."

She smiled at his astonishment.

"Come," she said, and he followed her in to the porch where a group of footmen and pages opened a way for her. An elderly servitor bowed low and beckoned forward a page.

"I see the King, Simmons, but I wish a word with Mr. Chiffinch, first," said the countess. "I'll not need attendance."

"As your ladyship desires."

The inner door swung open and she passed with Harry in her train to a hall which had gilded mirrors all around it, a broad oaken stairway in the middle and exits on each side. She led the way to the opening on the right where a few steps led up to a great gallery with flagged floor, paintings, war scenes and portraits mostly, hung along the walls. Carved doorways at intervals showed the entrance to apartments.

"The Stone Gallery," said the countess. "The King has a special room here in which he holds audience when he does not wish to be disturbed."

She cast her eye backwards and forwards along the gallery and quickened her pace, and when she came to where two doors were side by side she stopped at the

first of them, fumbled in her pouch for a key and unlocked it. As she drew Harry inside with her she sighed.

"Important we should not be seen," she said, and put her finger on her lips.

"Is this the King's room, madam?" said Harry in a low voice, his heart beating high.

"No; it is a room of mine, or was at one time. That is why I have the key—and I have another."

She pointed to a thick curtain drawn across an alcove. "Behind there is the door to the King's room."

"You do not mean a sudden entry?" protested Harry.

"Good reasons for it. He expects you; 'tis but a discrepancy of minutes. You have to trust me."

"To go in on him!"

"I know him, I tell you." The countess was impatient. "Would I do this without cause?"

She went to the alcove, softly pulled aside the curtain and lifted her finger for Harry to come forward.

"My God, madam, he's the King."

She made an angry gesture, then put the key silently into the lock.

"Enter quickly when I open."

The door swung back and Harry knew he had no choice, whatever befell. With heart jumping high he walked past her into a spacious room, sumptuous with velvet hangings, painted ceiling, and a great silver candelabra. The western sun coming through the upper part of the windows was in his eyes and helped, with his excitement, to blur the scene before him, but he was aware of a couple at the far end of the room who stood in talk, a tall man in satin and silver with a decoration hanging from his neck, and a girl in a

shimmering new taffeta gown. It came upon him that the girl was Edith Hardres, and in the same instant he knew the jealous countess had overreached herself. He had before him a royal audience in due form, and decorous—a King at ease, a deferential lady, two yards between them.

He would have backed to the other room again but the door with well-oiled lock and hinges had been closed behind him, and so for a second or two he stood unnoticed, his thoughts and intentions in chaos, and rising in him, uncalled for and against his will, instinctive fears and reverence towards that dark resplendent man whose profile now was clearly to be seen. In childhood he had been taught the King was next to God; this was the first time he had seen the King.

Swift are emotions and perceptions in a crisis.

The King was speaking quietly and Edith's "No, sire, no, sire, it could not be," came distinctly across the room, and on her face was anxiousness, and protest, a trace of dread, and Harry Godwyn wellnigh forgot his tremors in the sudden shock of what might be the meaning of the words and her demeanour. The King was smiling, put out a hand as though to soothe her and she shrank back a step almost without knowing it, pleading in every line of her.

"London owes a payment to Mistress Hardres, and welcome to the court should be some recompense to a brave maid."

"I beg you not to ask it, sire."

She put up her hand as though to ward off more that he would say, and in that simple action of the girl madness fell on Harry Godwyn.

"An end to this!"

The King turned to see a young man in homespun advancing on him.

"Who are you, sirrah?"

The astoundment of James robbed him of the first burst of proper words. If Harry Godwyn had not been blinded he would have seen no ill picture of a King: dignity and control; wide opened eyes; head thrown back of one who never before had challenge. Over all amazement. Here was no culprit discovered in the act.

"One in time to save your Majesty regrets. Mistress Hardres, you need an escort from the Palace."

"Buffoon! Your name? How come you here? Where are my servants?"

He hastened to the bell-rope by the fireplace, but Harry was before him.

"Would you stop me?"

Edith Hardres had flown across the room and had Harry Godwyn by the arm.

"Mr. Godwyn, you are mistaken," she cried in agony. "The King is all kindness."

"Kindness!"

"He but pressed me to stay in London for a month with my father."

"He would!"

The King whipped out his blade.

"Stand aside."

"Sire, it's Mr. Godwyn. You would not——"

"Be quiet, girl," said the King as he shook free from her.

"Aye, be quiet and let His Majesty have his way."

Harry's voice was changed, low and bitter.

"Stand to one side," said James sternly.

The vehemency that broke from Harry so startled the King that for the moment his sword point dropped to the floor.

"You're the King; they pray for you in church. You bring a young girl here, she trusting you. Look at her. You may run your sword through me, I can't stop it. What's the life of anyone to you? They say you're religious. Does your confessor hear of this? The Queen? I've often wondered what the King was like."

He came to an end, and his breast was rising and falling. "You can fetch in your men," he said.

A demented farmer, nothing more, yet some chance word in his tirade had struck home. James sheathed his sword. The flush was still on his face, but there was no rage in his voice when he spoke—a sombreness, almost a dignity.

"You have misunderstood that which is beyond your ken, Godwyn. You will suffer for it. Meanwhile, you may take Mistress Hardres to her father who awaits her below. You will be detained there. I will examine the matter further."

Edith Hardres was by Harry Godwyn's side before the King had finished speaking, and as Harry took her by the arm he realised that he was trembling from head to foot. They passed through the curtain as the King reached the bell-rope.

There was a surprise in the next room. The countess was there, the recipient of every word, flaming with excitement and suspense.

"Quick," she whispered. "I'll take the girl. Hurry, Mr. Godwyn, fly for your life. He has yet to find his servants. Straight down the gallery without, through the hall to the entrance. Do not make for my house; they'll seek you there."

Harry relinquished the girl and, with a stride, which became a run when no servant was in sight, made down the gallery.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

EDITH ASSERTS HERSELF

EDITH HARDRES sat with her father in the linen-draper's parlour, and they could hear the active broom of the apprentice in the shop, and, at the kitchen door, the scolding of the fishmonger by Mistress Richardson about the condition of a codfish. Out in the sunshine of the street boys were impeding pedestrians with a game of hopscotch, and a woman droned a sing-song about her bunches of lavender. Richardson, in his shirt sleeves at the doorway, was condoling with the neighbouring poulterer about the heat.

"Your nerves are all a-jangle," said Hardres, "Godwyn must have been beside himself. A tool for that jealous woman. The King to toss you under the chin! Pish, a compliment, no less, no more."

"He meant to be kind."

Edith Hardres had lost her liveliness and there was worry in her eyes.

"To-morrow we're on the way to Woodnesborough, you'll have no more of these encounters. Lord, something for you to talk of, how the King received you by yourself, and gave you nice words and meant no harm but only kindness because your father had been hard treated."

"He was dreadful to Mr. Godwyn."

"Can you wonder? I've said harsh things about James, and still I disbelieve in his religion but I'm not

too old to learn about the man himself. He's a good heart. A word from Dover on what's befallen, sends for me, curses misreports, smiles and begs me to forget; his servants in their zeal sometimes made mistakes, he said. What more could a King do? I'll wager Hales receives a sharpened word."

"You say we go to-morrow, father?"

"Directly after early breakfast, and we'll be at Woodnesborough by nightfall. I do not wish to see London any more. Barton should have used this fine weather to get in the early pears. There's the cherries, too—the birds will be making havoc."

"What of Mr. Godwyn?"

"Godwyn—he looks to his own affairs. What else? He brought all this on us—now on himself."

"He laboured on our behalf—to get you free."

"After first putting me in prison! Edith, the lad's got some passion for you, and we'd best out with it and never mind your blushes. I never thought of it till this few days—impudence and absurdity. He's but a beggared yeoman. You'll not fade because a waggoner in Kent throws a wistful eye on you. I'll take an oath it's why he's hid his hatred of me."

"He has no hatred. He smiles at your temper."

"Smiles at my temper! When? Damn his insolence! How came you by this, Edith?"

"He told me."

"Told you!"

The old man was on his feet now, with brows lowered, but Edith Hardres had no fear in her, indeed less agitation now that the point was reached. She looked at her father very straightly and calmly.

"I met him by accident while I was blackberrying. He helped me gather some blackberries. He was well

conducted, and before we parted said kind things of you."

"The villain!"

"No villain, father."

"Behind my back."

"I did not speak to him again till I went to Brook House to challenge him about his false testimony."

"You might have told me, Edith."

"A small secret—my only one."

"You don't think anything of this fellow—you'll not tell me that."

"You've heard all the talk I've ever had with him. He's a neighbour—he's gone in danger for you, for me as well."

"He stirred up this devil's brew," snapped Hardres. "Did he not owe us some effort?"

"I think we owe him something now," said Edith.

"You needed no protection from the King,—the reckless fool."

Hardres walked over to the chimney-piece, his hands behind his back, scrutinised the carved wooden candlesticks from Holland, and gave a discontented grunt, and then swung round on Edith suddenly.

"All he's been through is his own doing. What's more, I'd have been free to-day whether he had come to London or not. Dover's word to the King—that's why I'm here."

"Lord Dover was forced to it."

"I see no sign—all to the opposite. You have but heard the tale of Devonshire and those around him. Dover is the right hand of the King and Devonshire hates him. It was Sir Edward Hales. Hales is on the Council and has the ear of the King. Dover told me so himself."

" Father, father, why did Lord Dover try to take me to his house as he did. I was urged to go with him. I have learned a great deal of Lord Dover."

" I had a disquietude when I heard it—so much, I'll confess. But we may have wronged him, Edith. A prominent man gathers scandal as he goes. Dover has served me well. He kept his hands off you."

" Yes, he kept his hands off me."

" We'll away to Woodnesborough, girl, and you'll soon forget these men who've given you trouble—King and all."

" We leave the squire to his fate? "

" Why, what else can we do? " said Hardres in surprise.

Up in her room under the plea of getting ready her small belongings for the morrow's journey, Edith, having put on her hood and cloak, sat gazing out of her window into the dusk, raising courage for an excursion. She was not used to London streets, and at night-time they had drawbacks for a woman, yet the distance was not great, and the house would be easy to find and between eight and nine o'clock was no late hour. She had no help to offer but she must make the effort not for his sake but for her own. Was she to sleep that night without it?

Candles appeared in some of the windows facing her, couples talking and laughing passed in the street below, a flittering bat reminded her of home, the rattle of a coach came from Ludgate Street, and the hoarse cry of a boatman on the river a hundred yards away, and there floated up to her through the open casement a whiff of tobacco smoke from the alley-way by the linen-draper's shop. The smell of the tobacco gave her an idea, suddenly made easy her expedition. Why had she hesi-

tated? Lord Devonshire had kept his promise and sent his body servant, a man named Button, to stay at the linen-draper's as a guard, and Button was in the alley-way, smoking a pipe after supper. What better escort? A headache that threatened sleep. A walk to take the air, Button in attendance.

Edith was at the landing on her way over to her father, who, following supper, was busy in talk with Richardson with a bottle of cordial between them, when she was brought to a halt by a commotion in the street. She went back to her room to look through the window. A horseman had ridden up to the front of the linen-draper's shop and was dismounting, and as she recognised the visitor she felt all the heart go out of her. Dover hitched his horse to the tying post and knocked loudly at the door, and then Edith found her wits. She turned for the landing, sped down the kitchen stairs, and found Mistress Richardson washing plates in the sink.

"It's Lord Dover, Mistress Richardson."

"This hour of night?"

"I'll not see him. Button can come with me."

"I thought we'd done with Lord Dover, my dear. If so be——" Mistress Richardson paused, dishcloth in hand, to listen. "He's in the shop. Slip out through the alley-way."

Lights in the front window of Cornwallis's house in Lincoln's Inn indicated that some of its occupants at least had no cause for early retirement, and Edith was more thankful than ever to have Button with her, when with the assurance of familiarity he walked to the door and gave a sharp rat-tat with the iron knocker. Robins himself opened the door, and peered out suspiciously at his late callers.

"Heavens! Mistress Hardres!"

"I had to see you. I brought Button along."

"Come in. Come in. You too, Button."

He closed the door behind them, and shouted down the passage for a servant and when the man came said:

"James, you know Button. Take him to the kitchen."

Then he turned to the right, showed Edith into the library and, following her, lighted additional candles, and made her take a seat on a soft chair.

"I've come about Squire Godwyn."

"He was through the wood, Mistress Hardres, then this falls out. I've taken half a glass of usquebaugh to-night, the first time for a year. The countess came to see me. Do you bring news?"

"Naught, except about the King, and you've heard of that already. Is it so serious, Mr. Robins? I would not go to Kent till I had seen you."

"Serious! I was near walking to Knightrider Street only I knew not how your father would receive me. Guards on all the roads of London, at London Bridge, and they've sent men to the fords along the river as far as Kingston."

Edith looked at him and tried to speak but no words came.

"I'll have no bed to-night for fear word comes that they have taken him. I've horses saddled—I'd have to do my best with Devonshire and others. A double danger's in the squire himself. He'll give 'em good excuse to shoot or stab him out of hand if they come up with him."

Edith's face was upturned, her lips parted, but still she did not speak.

"He has a chance," said Robins, in tones which were

gruff for him. "Bolney seeks him out: Bolney has a hundred guineas in his pocket."

Then Edith found her voice, though it was thin and strained.

"We've brought all this on him, Mr. Robins, my father and I. If ill should come to him I must know."

"You've no blame to take, Mistress Hardres. I know the story. Harry was always mettlesome."

"If he's taken, I must see the King again."

"No need for that," said Robins, hastily. "Besides, 'twould not serve Harry."

"Then some other course and I care not what." Edith spoke with some of her old vigour. "I'll be plain with you, Mr. Robins, Mr. Godwyn felt he was responsible for my father's arrest and all that flowed from it—he and his brother between them. He has more than wiped out any injury from his brother. He has been patient with my father in Kent and has gone through all manner of danger here in London. My father refuses to delay our return, says we can do nothing for him. My father does not understand."

"No, your father does not understand, yet you have not said the whole of it."

"What remains, Mr. Robins?"

"The squire wishes no harm to Sir Valentine, but I doubt he'd play the hero for his sake. I take it on myself to tell you, Mistress Hardres, for fear harm befalls Harry Godwyn that you are Heaven and all the angels to him."

She rose unsteadily to her feet.

"What are you saying?"

"All in life is a groat to him beside."

The colour was rushing into Edith's face.

"He feels this about me?"

" Every drop of his blood is yours—and without hope —he never had any hope since this affair began."

" Why has he never told me? "

" Told you! "

The staggered Robins asked himself if his ears deceived him, and she returned his look unabashed.

" I do not understand it," she said, and then she sank down into her chair again and turned her face away, while Robins stood regarding her with arms folded across his breast. A minute went by before she looked up.

" I should be grateful to you for your openness, Mr. Robins."

Robins went forward and took up her hand and kissed it.

" We must do what we can for him," he said quietly.

" I'll stay in London: father can go to Kent alone."

" The squire's his own best helper at this moment. If we can but get him out of England—that's the task."

" He will come back? "

" There's that on foot which will put the country in a ferment by the time the winter wheat is sown. Then Harry will have no cause to fear the King of England."

" Lord Dover came to Knightrider Street this evening —I slipped away."

" To see you? "

" Or my father."

" No limit to him. He wishes to trample down your bad opinion."

" He could not be so foolish; he knows I have the truth about him."

" Odds never frightened Dover in love or war."

" My father has listened to him in pleasure at being free again and the King's cordial words."

" I've been thinking—if matters went amiss with the squire it's Dover who could save him. Do you imagine you could force yourself to some civility? "

" Never. You make me shudder by speaking of it."

" I feared it might be so. Ah, well, we'll get him loose without Lord Dover. Mistress Hardres, I'd like your promise to go back to Kent to-morrow; I begin to see a situation in which your presence here might be of disadvantage."

" Will I thus be cut off from all news about Mr. Godwyn? That cannot be."

" I'll undertake to send you a letter twice a week by the carrier. The carrier comes to Woodnesborough? "

" Old Timmins is not regular. Address me at ' The Fountain ' in Canterbury. I'll ride over every day or send one of the men."

" If there is great need, some urgency, I'll despatch a messenger direct from here to Woodnesborough Hall."

" Will you do that for me? "

" And for the squire."

" Mr. Godwyn has good friends."

" The one sure test," said Robins.

Edith went back to Knightrider Street, a-prick with fears, though somewhat comforted by the stalwartness of Robins and his resources. There was always Lord Devonshire, she reflected, a great nobleman with secret power. She chilled as she recalled what Robins had said as to the squire's danger to himself, his reckless mood, his almost sure resistance to any who might corner him. Then suddenly she was conscious of happiness beating in upon her in spite of all her dread, nor could painful common sense dispel it, nor the knowl-

edge that no way had yet been found to give help to Harry Godwyn.

When Edith reached Knightrider Street, Dover had gone, but her father and the Richardsons were awaiting her in the parlour, and there was a word of chiding, and some exclamations of relief before the linen-draper and his wife took up their candles, and Mistress Richardson an extra one for Button, who slept in a cot in the warehouse.

"You went far afield," said Richardson.

"The guardianship of Button tempted me. I observed he wore a sword."

"I would that you had stopped within doors this evening," said Sir Valentine. "There were good reasons."

"They were the very reasons, father, that sent me hurrying forth."

When Richardson and his wife had gone Sir Valentine was more direct.

"Lord Dover has been here, Edith."

"Does he still wish to add me to his collection?"

"Those are no words to use. Lord Dover is showing himself a man of honour. He was here to-night to ask permission to sue for your hand in marriage."

"Marriage. Lord Dover! What's come to him, father?"

"This is an honourable proposal and one not to be laughed at, my girl."

"I am far from laughing at it," said Edith.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

REFUGE WITH PHINEAS NOGG

THE quick progress of Harry Godwyn took him to the great porch at Whitehall without interruption, and he slowed his pace as he walked past the group of officials at the entrance. The countess's groom touched his forelock and he got a nod of thanks as Harry took the bridle rein and mounted.

Past the grenadier sentries at the gateway who gave him but a casual glance, Harry turned to the left down narrow King Street with relief and hope mingling with his excitement.

When he reached the widening at New Palace Yard, Tothill Street in front had less traffic and he put the grey to a gentle canter, and he was well past the Abbey when he had a shock. Hoof beats behind him! He twisted his head to observe a hundred yards away a horseman coming upon him, and Harry guessed it was one of the pursuers who had managed to thread his way more quickly than his companions through busy King Street. The grey responded with a leap to Harry's spurs, and the driver of a country cart laden with sacks of barley drew in out of the way, and a woman with milk buckets suspended from a yoke stood back against the wall to watch the chase.

Tothill Street was soon traversed. In Petty France, which led to the main Chelsea Road and thence to the open country Harry held his own, and then round a

bend he came upon disaster. A hay waggon piled high was sideways across the road with a broken wheel, its two horses released from traces and tug chains, blocking the passage to one side, and on the other the waggoner, with sympathisers, dully surveying the damage.

Despair and anger encompassed Harry. Was such a trifle to bring his downfall? He reined in his horse and with determination that one man should not take him drew his sword and swung round to meet the approaching rider. His sword almost fell from his hand in surprise, for the horseman was now near enough to be recognised. It was Bolney—Bolney laughing at Harry's desperate move.

"The gallant squire refuses to be taken alive," said he as he came abreast. "Faith, Harry, why don't you use your eyes? Why did you run from me?"

"I'd run from anyone this half hour," said Harry, with an answering smile. "Why are you not on the way to Holland?"

"Changeable is my name. I cared not for a lonely journey, had some curiosity about your latest prank. When I got your letter I went off and roused old Robins out of bed."

"This is no accident, your following me?"

"The countess, Harry. A practical woman. I was to wait outside the Palace till you appeared—some emergency was in her mind it seemed. A risk for me, I told her. 'Oh, you!' she says. She's lost her manners, Harry, but she lent me a groom to note your exit and I kept under cover in Scotland Street and still had my discomforts. But here I am. I held discreetly behind you till we came to Tothill Street and then by all appearances I put the fear of God in you."

"Bolney, I've insulted the King."

"The King, eh! You play high, lad."

"I had no choice——"

"We'll get beyond these yokels; here's no safe talking place."

They dismounted to lead their horses and the waggoner and those around him pushed to one side to let them pass.

"A few miles quickly covered is best beginning for your story, Harry," said Bolney, as they mounted again. "We'll break from the Chelsea road a mile long, circle Kensington village, and point for Highgate and Epping. Open country in an hour if we're not followed."

"You're the guide," said Harry.

They rode a steady trot and canter, giving a frequent eye behind them, and though they saw no signs of chase yet they were too near Whitehall for anything but as much speed as they could make inside a gallop. When at last they pulled their smoking horses London was out of sight and cornfields were on either side of them.

"There's a pond ahead and the creatures need a drink," said Bolney.

They turned the thirsty animals loose and squatted on the top of a grassy mound for Harry to tell his tale. Bolney heard it with whistling interjections.

"The countess has come near hanging you."

"I bear her no malice."

"Horse and foot raking London for you. Gad, though, I'd have liked to see James's face. You're a hellion, Harry, so they'll say. We're for Harwich as soon as may be, and no mistake on it."

"Do we ride to-night? Harwich is a long way."

"We'll push through to Epping, find a dry bank in the forest for a few hours' sleep and on before day breaks. I notice there's a package strapped behind your

saddle and I'll go bail 'tis bread and meat provided by our thoughtful countess. Enough to last us till to-morrow."

"She leaves little unthought of."

Bolney twitched the grass by his side thoughtfully. "Yet no woman for a peaceful man to live with. You'll hardly believe it, Harry, but I'm glad she didn't fall in love with me."

With the sun sinking low in the west they rode on through by-roads and bridle paths, skirted a hamlet now and again and passed a highway which Bolney said was the north road out of London. Darkness had been on them an hour or more before they reached the fringe of woodland which signalled the beginning of Epping forest. The roads through the forest were as good as those in the open and some were better, and Bolney did not call a stoppage until the moon was high and Harry judged it was within an hour of midnight. They made a halt amid a stretch of oak and beech with hazel undergrowth, and when they had given their horses long tether on some saplings in a clearing, they found a sheltered rise where they might eat some of Harry's bread and meat in comparative restfulness, and on the dry grass find opportunity for a needed sleep.

"Safe enough here," said Harry.

"A respite only. We'll not be safe till we're thoroughly uncomfortable at sea."

Amid the twittering of early greenfinches Harry woke to find Bolney unfastening a saddle bag. "I came without provender for myself, but with a gallon of oats in place of it."

He made two little heaps on the grass for the horses.

"The countess is not the only one who thinks of things," said Harry.

Bolney strode up and fastened the saddle bag. "Holland should be our destination."

"Is there a doubt of it?"

"I woke with a maggot in my brain, Harry—an idea against my judgment. But all the same it's well for us to take account of what's best to do."

"I thought our course was mapped."

"I am of good family—the second cousin of a baronet—I've told you that before. There's no doubt of my blood—who'd dispute it? But even the best of families have their offshoots. Would you believe it that my mother's brother, Phineas Nogg by name, is a farmer?"

"Is it so great a fault?"

"He's no squire, Harry. He's got but forty acres and what's more he keeps a smithy. He's a blacksmith as well. The confession's necessary."

"Where's the shame?"

"I'd not have the fact known in Whitehall. I have my pride, though you may not have noticed it."

"A suspicion now and then. Why this talk of an uncle?"

"Phineas Nogg's holding and smithy are not more than five miles from here, and on the way to Chelmsford—we have to pass by Chelmsford. It's a lonely place and except for farmers, who bring their horses to be shod sometimes, Phineas Nogg, his man and his boy and the old woman who keeps house for him, why they don't see visitors once a year."

"I begin to have a glimmering."

"I know not how he'd receive me. A strident old curmudgeon with a hoard of money."

"I'm strongly for Holland."

"Deep sea or the devil? Perhaps it's best."

As they rode on towards Chelmsford Bolney told

more of his uncle, whose parsimony, he explained, had always been a byword in the family.

"I was hard pressed five years ago and took the trouble to ride out to him—a mere matter of twenty guineas. He heard me out and then was pleased to be facetious in his snarling fashion. He has the bearing of a blacksmith. He said he reckoned my sword and horse together were worth six guineas. Why had they not been sold? He pointed to my hat—a new one—for which I'd gone in debt to see him, and asked why I should throw away a guinea on a gee-gaw. Thus to his nephew who maintained the name of Bolney at court."

"He lacks your pride of family."

"Pride! What think you he suggested? 'If so be you're hard put to it,' says he, 'take off your finery. You're my nephew and I'll not see you want. You'll be no use at a plough, but you can drive a harrow, and there's digging and hoeing. You'll be handy in the smithy. A shilling a day for you, all your food and a cot in the attic.'"

"No uncle for Richard Bolney!"

"Aye, and he made it a condition I should learn to milk three goats—goats!"

"An interesting relative."

"He and his goats!" said Bolney viciously.

When Chelmsford came in sight Bolney was in doubt about making a circuit of the town; the jaded condition of their horses and their own need of a meal helped him to decide against it. "The hue and cry may come here later but 'tis not to be thought of for to-day." They rode into Chelmsford drowsing after mid-day, and the ostler at "The Saracen's Head," with perspiration making runlets down his grimy face, came to the door of the taproom, pewter in hand.

"Take 'em into the stable and tie 'em up."

"A peck of oats," said Bolney, "a few ulls, with the oats,—water too. If you'll give them a rub down while we're eating dinner there's a shilling for you."

The ostler put his pewter on the window sill and tramped into the yard by their side; not often were passing travellers free with a shilling. "I'll see to 'em. Leave 'em to me."

Harry and Bolney entered the inn to find two maids clearing away the remains of an early dinner for some who had been before them.

"Market day," said Bolney. "Lucky we're late. Less company for us the better."

Hot sausages and eggs and tankards of ale lifted care for a while from hungry and thirsty men. It was half an hour before they reached the plum tart, and they had come nearly to the end of it when Bolney relaxed to the moon-faced serving maid. "Hard work this morning, lass. Is't always so on market day?"

"Nay, sir, 'tis no market day. There were other comers."

"You've had a coach from London? Or perhaps 'twas going up to town?"

"A coach don't give us such a bustle as what we've had this morning. They come from London, some of them."

"They weren't by chance black-coated men, ministers of the gospel?"

"Ministers of the gospel!" exclaimed the girl. "Faith, sir, they had a whorl of oaths, some of 'em. Scarlet coats. I guess they were soldiers, not ministers."

Bolney took a draught of beer. "I surmised they might be friends of ours. Bring the reckoning, lass."

Outside in the yard the horses were led forth by the ostler and Bolney had a good word about their grooming, inquired as to the oats and water and then produced not one shilling, but two.

"Soldiers here this morning?"

"Come disturbing all my work, that's what they did, a rare fuss."

"Maybe we'll overtake them on the road to London?" said Bolney turning to Harry.

"No, you won't do that, master. They be going t'other way. They be going to Harwich looking out for some of they politicals, they be. I heard 'em talking. People hasting to get across the water."

"Troubled times we're in," said Bolney, and he swung himself to the saddle.

They rode out to the street, and Bolney turned in the direction from which they had come, and they were on the outskirts of the town before he said, "It's my uncle after all, Harry."

"A Heaven-sent uncle, I'll say now."

"Wait till you see him," said Bolney.

Late in the afternoon they rode up a sequestered lane to a thatched farmhouse, standing back a hundred feet or so from the road, by its side a smithy with open doors, and beyond a tidily-kept garden, protected by fencing. As they got off their horses a gaunt, grey-haired man with heavy shoulders came round the corner with a prong on his shoulder.

"Who be you?" he called out. "What d'ye want?"

"Why, uncle, don't you know me?" said Bolney cheerily.

"It's you, is it. Well, I don't like the looks of you, never did. You'd better be off."

"You haven't heard what I've to say." Bolney was all good humour.

"Nor don't want to. I've no money for you. You've been here before."

"Money! I want no money. Bless my heart."

"What are you here for then?"

"I have not to seek for gold henceforth, uncle. It's due that you should know it. A small fortune has come to me through hard work and some gracious favour. No pinching for me now. What's more I can assist my friends—which is a great happiness to me."

Phineas Nogg grunted suspiciously. Harry thought he had never seen so large a mouth or one set so hard and close.

"I'll go far as this, uncle—for your rough welcome hides a kindly heart—if ever you're beset or wish for help, I, your nephew Richard, out of my small estate should claim the right to help you,—aye, even to the extent of a hundred pounds. I'd never pass my uncle by, I am a Bolney."

"No soft words. You'll not get me by the snout, nephew."

"When my friends at court said to me 'Bolney, where can we find a quiet resting place for a young nobleman who wishes not to be observed for some weeks?' To whom did my thoughts flash at once? To my uncle, my one blood relative. Why should he not profit as well as others. This is Sir George Tachbrook, a relative of the Earl of Devonshire. You'll have heard the Earl of Devonshire's in disfavour and that big events are toward in London?"

"I've heard naught of it," said Phineas Nogg, but he turned a look of curiosity on Harry and had lost some of the rancour in his voice.

"I am in attendance on Sir George. I have the honour to call him friend. We wish a nook to stay in, and the better that we shall not be talked of even by the bovines in your circle; we'll take a hand at work for you, at anything you like."

"You want work, is that it?"

"Only as a cover. There's ten good guineas every week for you, uncle, while we stay with you, and we want nothing but plain fare and a couple of cots."

"Ten guineas!" said Phineas Nogg. "Ten guineas did you say?"

"For every week that no one comes and roots us out."

"I'd like to see anyone who'd root out people staying in my house. You'd better come indoors."

For days that lengthened into a week and then into two Harry and Bolney found seclusion with Phineas Nogg and his household, and the old man discovered that not only were the ten guineas forthcoming on every Saturday night but that one at least of his guests was serviceable not only with the cows, but with the pigs, and did not disdain to lend a hand with the sledge in the forge. His nephew, Richard, was lazy, he always had been, but he dressed himself in country garb, and if he sat on the grass while the others worked, it could be endured; ten guineas was half of a year's profit. Luff, the labourer, and Timms the boy, and old Esther who cooked the food in the house were bolt-eyed at first, but years of country slavery and small commons had left them little inquisitiveness or imagination. On Saturdays Bolney would give them a shilling each which made them believe old Nogg had fabulously rich relations.

After supper at night the servants would go off to

bed—they were always up at five in the morning—and then Phineas Nogg would sit for a while in the kitchen with his visitors, and, softened by the growing pile in his strong box, would talk gruffly of farm and forge to Harry, listen heavy of face to Bolney's flippancies, and probe clumsily for the precise amount of his nephew's fortune. Once Bolney asked him why there were no chairs in the kitchen, only wooden stools without backs. "Chairs make servants lazy," he replied, "no trouble to sit upright in 'em. I got three chairs in the parlour and they never been used, not as I knows on."

"You've always been careful, uncle; I wish I had your qualities."

"There's two kinds of people, nephew, spenders and savers, and the spenders always lives on the savers. It can't be helped, more's the pity."

"Surely no weak generosity has ever hampered you?"

"A dealer in Chelmsford buys some of my steers, takes 'em to London and sells 'em for half as much again. What's that but living on my savings?"

"You always had a brain, uncle."

"Brain, aye, that's why I've saved. Now there's you a-smoking that tobacco, costs money, that do, and smells just like that heap of dried stinging nettles, I set light to yesterday. Where's the difference? You try some of those dried stinging nettles, nephew. You're going to spend your fortune; you're that sort."

"You actually burned good stinging nettles, why, uncle?"

"I don't waste nothing. They got too dry for the goats to eat, they won't eat 'em dry."

Near three weeks had gone when Bolney asked his

uncle to allow Luff to ride to Chelmsford with a letter for the carrier to London.

" We begins to cart the wheat to-morrow."

" You've got Sir George and me. Let Luff earn five shillings."

" Five shillings you say. Lookee, nephew, I don't trust Luff in Chelmsford, he might drop some dangerous word."

Bolney rubbed his chin.

" Perhaps I'd best go myself."

" What say if I went! "

" I never thought of that."

" There's the horse, he'll want a bait; bread and cheese for me, and 'twill spoil a day."

" We'll say ten shillings."

" I've taken a liking to you, nephew, and I'll do ye a turn. The wheat can wait a day."

The wheat had been carried, and the barley as well, and the ricks were all thatched when three weeks later another visit of Phineas Nogg to Chelmsford brought Bolney a reply in Robins' handwriting addressed to " Andrew Brown, cornchandler, to await at ' The Saracen's Head.' "

" The health of yourself and your friend, Mr. Quick, is the first consideration," he wrote. " You should continue in the country and I hope, when you come back later, you will both be strong and well. You would take heavy risks now in London air, so I beg you accept a friend's advice and remain at present amid the green fields.

" We are all filled with rumours here about what is to happen between the King and his son-in-law in Holland, but I pay little credence to wild talk. We

have a good king, God bless him, and I pray he may be not too much troubled. The coffee houses are agog with an entertaining story of how a young farmer outfaced His Majesty about a girl and Lord Dover is somewhere in the thick of it. The fellow's farm is to be sequestrated in favour of his brother, 'tis asserted, and serve him right, say I, though as a lawyer, I doubt if such a seizure can be maintained. 'Tis but a tit-bit of gossip for your delectation, far away as you are and I know you love the chatter that is going round. Items of great import, perchance, when next I write.

"Mr. Quick should not worry about his affairs which I watch carefully. He will not lose money over them in his absence. Accept the same assurances about your own concerns; it looks as if the price of wheat will be high in October. My last word is like my first, conserve your health; it cannot be replaced. Mistress Blunt sends her best wishes; she looks to see you both before the autumn is through.

"NATHANIEL BLUNT."

"They'd take my farm, would they!" said Harry fiercely.

"They'll take your life as well if they get the chance," said Bolney. "Robins does not write so covertly for nothing."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE SQUIRE'S WILL

EDITH and her father arrived home on a sunshiny morning with the leaves of the beeches in the drive twinkling a welcome, the fowls clucking away as of old in the farmyard, and the bucket and chain of the well making its familiar rattle under Betty Little's winding. Edith was glowing with joyful impatience, cried to her father to hurry his horse, and shouted to Watch and Ringer who came barking down the drive. The tang of the big walnut tree was as sweet a scent as she had ever known.

At the house there was a smother of ejaculations from Mistress Barton, and Edith held to her for a moment, while Pinchett and Wacher brought in the saddle-bags, and Betty Little wiped the tears from her eyes, and Hardres grunted at the fuss and was as much moved as any one of them. Barton came from the nuttery, bill-hook in hand, and with burrs clinging to his whiskers.

"All well, Barton?"

"All well, Sir Valentine. Ye put 'em to rights up in Lunnon?"

"Yes, I put them to rights."

"Ye'll want your dinner," said Barton.

But before dinner Edith had to take her father for a walk around outside, and Barton with them, tugging to get rid of the pertinacious burrs, told the happenings—one of the cows was showing signs of wasting, Watch had caught a young hare the day before, the five acres of

barley had been mowed and was nearly ready for carrying.

They came to the orchard, and Edith declared that the Pearmain apples had grown to double size during their absence though it was less than two weeks. The cherries, as Sir Valentine had feared, had suffered diminution.

"They cussed birds," explained Barton. "I was a day late in putting up the nets. Wife, she got a good lot of elderberry wine coming. You're fond of elderberry wine, Sir Valentine?"

"I like cherry brandy better."

"They didn't look ripe to me, Sir Valentine."

"A pair of glasses before next summer, Barton."

They reached a bed of young cabbages, which had been sadly disturbed, some plants being trampled down, and deep hoofmarks showing over a large part of the plot.

"In Heaven's name," said Hardres, who was as proud of his vegetables as of his flowers.

"The squire again," replied Barton fiercely.

"The squire!"

"You'll not tell me the squire came and trod down those cabbages," said Edith.

"The squire's in London, Barton."

"What matters where he is? Why should Jarvis have brought they three heifers round this way to Sandwich market? Came up the drive like racers they did. I couldn't stop 'em, nor Wacher either. Jarvis, he ran behind 'em, bellowing. He had his orders—let 'em chase in here over the garden while you was away."

Hardres's white moustache went up under his nose.

"Heifers are contrary. Better get the plot tidied up. We've more plants we can put in."

Edith was a quieter girl, despite the exclamation when the tragic loss of nine ducklings through a giant rat was related, and the touch of eagerness when Barton proudly lifted the top of the hencoops to show the prosperous broods of young chickens with their mothers. Threading through the pleasure of home-coming was a thought of Brook House hidden in the trees two miles away without the squire, with Tomlyn waiting for news. She ate but little dinner and agreed with her father that excitement had taken away her appetite.

Though Edith had hours, and sometimes days, of unhappiness, hope presently began to rise in her when there came no news that Harry Godwyn had been taken prisoner. Then arrived a heartening letter from Robins to tell her that there had been some lessening of the effort to arrest the squire and Bolney, and that, if they had not escaped to Holland, they were well concealed—from himself as from others. After that was a message, cautiously worded, from which she learned that Harry Godwyn and Bolney were in some country nook and that Robins was in touch with them; they were well supplied with money and, if they would but be patient, safety would be theirs within a month or so under cover of a storm which was blowing up from the east.

It was this letter which cemented a fluctuating purpose in Edith, and one morning, while her father was at Sandwich, she set out in the other direction to walk to Ash. She had been drawn to Brook House many times, desirous to talk with Tomlyn, to tell him what she knew about the squire, to hear if by any chance tidings unknown to Robins had trickled through. She had to gird herself. Tomlyn and the others had seen her meeting with the squire in the avenue on that fateful day of hay-carrying, had seen him follow on her

heels, and it was not to be supposed that through these weeks Tomlyn at least was without some hint of the dangers which had engulfed him.

Edith walked up the avenue calling herself a coward for the flutterings within her and, as she neared the house, she saw Tomlyn with his back towards her at work building a stedall for the last of the wheat ricks.

"Mr. Tomlyn," she said, and Tomlyn straightened himself to face her with a faggot in his arms.

"Why, Mistress Hardres!" His face was lighted up.

"I had to come."

"I've been expecting you."

"I should have come before; I ought to have come."

They went into the house together and Tomlyn led her to the room facing the lawn and she sat down in the squire's chair by the fireplace, while Tomlyn hurried to the kitchen to get her a horn of milk, which he was sure she needed after that hot walk from Woodnesborough. She noted the spotlessness of the oak floor, the shining copper candlesticks on the chimney-piece, the polished fowling-piece in the corner, the clock with its loud slow ticking which gave a sense of home. On a peg hung an old worn coat and breeches, and beneath was a pair of heavy boots cleaned and oiled. Tomlyn caught her eye on the latter as he came in with the milk.

"Ought to be upstairs but we left them there after he went. Handy for him when he comes back. Deborah says it makes her think he is not so far away while they hang there."

"You know why Mr. Godwyn went to London?"

"Mostly. Mr. Robins sent me a letter, squire did too."

"I cannot tell you all he did for me and my father."

"Squire was never one for half-measures, Mistress Hardres. If it hadn't been for his brother Tom—but it's Lord Dover I'm afeared of. Like enough the squire's across the sea by now, though."

"Mr. Robins sends to tell me Mr. Godwyn has not yet gone to Holland; with a friend, a Mr. Bolney, he hides in some country place which was not written in the letter."

"Is it bad news, or good?"

"I wish I knew. Mr. Robins says he must remain hidden for a month or two, then perhaps he may be able to come home."

"I get into a sweat about it sometimes, Mistress Hardres. I've been hoping to see you ever since you've been back."

"When I came up the avenue I felt like one walking into the lion's den."

"I never thought it was fault of yours. Then Mr. Robins wrote that I could rest on you to help the squire."

"I only wish I could."

"Squire wrote me from an inn somewhere to the north of London just before he thought he was starting for Holland."

Tomlyn went over to a cupboard, unlocked it and brought out some sheets of paper and put on a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Would you like to hear it?"

"If it has no private matter."

"Naught private from you."

Tomlyn went over to the window for better light and read aloud the letter:

"I am at an inn at Marylebone, which is away beyond

London to the north and I leave to-night with Mr. Richard Bolney, in the employ of Mr. Cornwallis, to go to Holland and shall expect to sail back again with Mr. Cornwallis when he comes. You'll have charge of Brook House till I return. You know where I keep the key of the oak chest with the money in it—beneath the first pile of books on the shelf above my bed. If any payment for dues or wages comes beyond what we have in the house, you must thresh some of the wheat, which stands high, and for which you should get a fair price at Canterbury. Send three of the heifers to Sandwich market soon after receiving this; the one which has made no growth, the red and white one and the one with the split hoofs; I don't like the look of them and never shall. Bridget should be watched; she may drop her calf any day or night now and you know how she feels it; keep her in the pen and if there is any sign somebody had better sit up at night with her and have a bran mash ready; she always needs it. If you are short-handed for the harvest go and see Mr. Sackett at Sandwich and make it a favour to me that he lends you a couple of apprentices for a week. Pay them regular harvest money and see that they have plenty of good food and beer. If I am not back by October get the turnips up before the frost comes and be sure they have a bedding of straw in the barn; it stops the bottom ones from rotting. You'll remember my plans for seeding; you'll have but the wheat to attend to.

"I am in flight because I knocked Lord Dover from his horse within these last few hours. Mistress Hardres is safe, so is Sir Valentine. I place it on you strictly that henceforth there shall be no hostility in word or act towards Woodnesborough Hall by you or anybody belonging to me. If Sir Valentine exasperates you, bear with

it; he is an old man and has been through much. Should the occasion arise whereby you can serve Mistress Hardres in any matter great or small, you will do it for me without regard to cost or risk. In this last week she has suffered as no girl has any right to suffer, and I had my share in it at first through the foolish notion of saving Tom. I think she is better disposed to me now; although she knows me a blunderer she will have perceived why I proceeded as I did. Do what you can for her in any matter. I feel certain that she will come to see you at Brook House because she may have some fancy that she led me to the assault on Dover. Tell her I would have done it for any young girl in the clutches of such a creature as he is.

"I have made my will and sent it to Mr. Cornwallis's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, because there is much doubtfulness as to what may happen to me, and I may come upon mishap. I have left you one hundred guineas and Deborah fifty, also five guineas for everyone who is employed on the farm. Brook House and the land must go to Tom—'twill fall to other hands in a year or so—but he is my brother and should have it. For once he'll find no excuse to curse me. My mother's gold watch and her ring with rubies in it are wrapped up in silk in the oak box, and I have left them to Mistress Hardres, also my books—there are between twenty and thirty of them—if they are not too dry for her and she cares to have them.

"I look to be with you before the year is out, but if not, take my thanks, Tomlyn, for all your years of good guardianship. "HARRY GODWYN.

"P.S.—On second thoughts I believe it would be better to put oats instead of wheat in the seven-acre; the heavy black sort. We've been short of oats these two winters."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

LORD DOVER MAKES AN ADMISSION

THE end of August was at hand when a letter from London stirred Sir Valentine, took away the sunshine of the day for Edith, and set Mistress Barton in a fluster, what with chickens to be killed and plucked, a currant tart to be put in hand, the spare-bedroom to be cleaned against emergency and the red bedspread freshly ironed to say nothing of polishing the silver. Lord Dover, riding to some of the coast towns on the King's affairs, would stay the night at Sandwich and announced a desire to pay his respects at Woodnesborough Hall.

"A compliment; he could not do less, being near," said Hardres. "A courteous letter."

"I hoped never to see Lord Dover again," said Edith.

"He has behaved with dignity, you must allow him that."

"Are you still so blind about Lord Dover, father?"

"He's told me openly he seeks your favour, which is no crime in him, my girl."

"Where's his sense? Am I a child? The man must think I'm simple. And you so serious about it!"

She flung up her hands in despair.

"It is unseemly to hold so strong a prejudice about Lord Dover. I do not belaud him; he's saint no more than devil. But there's common sense, Edith,—also perverseness."

"You slight all I've told you, father; you believe him. It horrifies me."

"Am I without experience, my dear? Easy for enemies to weave a net against a man with Dover's record."

"Do you wish to know what I think of Lord Dover? He is bold and wicked and clever. You told me so yourself when first we met him at Sandwich."

"I could have said as much against any lord in London, and I was incensed that day—old age does not better my temper——"

"It's never bad with me," cried Edith in sudden contrition, and she hurried to him and pulled his head down to hers.

"Old age, rubbish!"

He held her at arm's length.

"No one could ever be old who lived with you, baggage."

"Well then! Father, it's I who have the bad temper. Go on about Lord Dover."

"Edith, I keep brains enough to judge a man by what he does and not by what people say of him. You've been cankered by all the unhappiness and excitement in London and you dwell upon it, and there's the whole truth."

"Would you have me marry Lord Dover?"

Sir Valentine started.

"Marry him! Why, girl, now you put it to me, I know not what to say. He's old. He has the wrong religion. I'd hate to see you marry any man, yet some day you must make a choice. He holds high rank; many would envy you. Withal 'tis against all manners to flout advances respectfully made; to see him will do no harm."

"I'm tingling that I have to see him."

"He must not lack a welcome—the King's friend."

"Pish! Since when was Sir Valentine Hardres a lick-

spittle? Oh, fear not, he'll find no churlishness in me —if you desire it so. I wish he was come and gone. I rest on you, father, to see I'm not alone with him."

"He will not so far presume."

"If he keeps his mask, I'll bear with him. I know him for a wretch, but I'll see he has a good dinner, and I'll put on my new gown, and I'll say 'yes' and 'no' to him as best I may, and I'll thank Heaven most devoutly when I see his back."

"No such heavy duty—a pleasant face and word. I doubt if he rests here more than an hour or so. Moreover, you may find him not so disagreeable."

"I dread the sight of adders," said Edith. She went off to the kitchen.

Lord Dover came from Sandwich to Woodnesborough, unattended, on a horse borrowed from the inn, in plain riding dress. Edith watched him from an upper window as he rode slowly to the house, calm and thoughtful, hand and rein dropped to the pommel, his gaze turned from right to left as he took in the beds of foxgloves and gilliflowers with the dark-leaved rosemary and silvery lavender alternating, and the background of elms and beeches opening out to greensward. He had an appreciative eye.

Sir Valentine, in Sunday coat with smallsword by his side, was at the door to greet the visitor, and Dover himself could not have been more courtly, nor any squire more cordial. Hardres was at his best as host—a country gentleman at that.

"An honour and a great pleasure, my lord," he said with a welcoming smile, as Dover lifted himself alertly from the saddle and gave his rein to Wacher who stood in readiness.

"An intrusion long planned, Sir Valentine and I'll

not excuse myself." He waved his hand towards the garden. "I come for the privilege of a meeting with my friends and find them in an arbour which itself would be a lure."

"Kent grows most things well, my lord."

"Its gallant men and lovely women are known. They have a fitting setting. I trust Mistress Hardres is in good health? Yourself, I need not ask about."

"Blooming like one of her own flowers. Household cares for the moment—in the kitchen, wearing a long pinner. You'll join us in our homely dinner in an hour —she expects it."

"You are kind. I am sure I shall not be able to hold it against Mistress Hardres that she is in the kitchen."

They went into the house, and Dover consented to try a glass of October brew, and he found opportunity for explaining how his visit had been so long put off, and why he had descended on Sir Valentine with but two days' notice. Affairs in London and indeed throughout the country were in no good state, and before long might be in ferment. He was on a mission to the southern ports; from Sandwich he travelled west to Portsmouth.

"Mayors of the Cinque ports meet me at Sandwich. There are many links in the chain, and messengers go to and fro."

Edith came in as they were talking, her pinner gone and in its place a dimity gown—a dainty figure, composed of face and bearing, with a word of greeting. Dover, bowing low, touched her fingers with his lips.

"An invasion, Mistress Hardres, but I was overtempted, being so close at hand. You will forgive a soldier who is travelling in haste."

"My father's friends are welcome at any time, my lord."

"After your unhappiness in London I, a part of it, had my trepidations. I could not fail to bring back painful hours. I hope they may soon be forgotten."

"Nightmares disappear in the morning, my lord."

At dinner Dover was the old friend, easier in manner than in London, with a quieter note. The confidential freedom with which he talked of the Court, the Council Chamber, the King himself, conveyed a trustfulness and familiarity which surprised Edith and gratified her father. In times long past, Sir Valentine had touched high affairs; once again he was within the circle. As for Edith, she cut up the chickens and served the sausages and the vegetables and sent Mistress Barton for an extra bottle of wine and only spoke when her father asked a question or Dover made a comment on the toothsome country fare.

"Is it more than the puff of a breeze?" asked Hardres. "When were there no rumblings—no malcontents?"

"I would that the matter could thus be dismissed, Sir Valentine, but though we do not fear the issue we are preparing with might and speed. William of Orange has made his determination."

"He has declared it!"

"In act, though not in word. He is enrolling good sailors giving them greater pay than English sailors receive. Our drums are beating up for seamen in the shipping parts of London, and pressboats are on the Thames for we are short of men, all our best having been secured away from us."

"The Dutch to cross to England is a huge venture, surely?"

"They have taken up four million pounds at interest and all know the money is for a war."

"Four millions! He makes no two bites at a plum, this William."

"We have another regiment on the way from Ireland, perhaps more trouble than they are worth. His Majesty has ordered all the officers of the army, lords-lieutenant, deputy-lieutenants, governors of castles and forts to report forthwith to their respective commands. The seaport towns are to be doubly garrisoned."

"I never thought again to see fighting on English soil."

"William has no chance but one—the rebels and traitors here, and we are not dismayed. The English people though they quarrel among themselves will see no foreigner find a footing. The King has resolved to call a new Parliament; writs will be issued next month."

Hardres drummed thoughtfully on the table with the handle of his knife.

"The country will be in uproar, my lord?" said Edith.

"If William lands, which I doubt. An Armada tried to come here once, Mistress Hardres."

Edith could not escape the stroll round the gardens to the farmyard after dinner with her father and Dover and was surprised at the knowledge shown about growing things by the courtier; soil and crops and livestock must often have engaged his thoughts and given him the satisfaction which only comes to the true lover of the country. He explained why two new varieties of pears, young trees of which had been sent from France, were better in flavour and more durable in keeping than the old Katherine pears; he had found a late autumn pruning help the crop.

He asked for Sir Valentine's advice about cows; he had but four down in Hertfordshire and was thinking of in-

creasing the number, and he listened attentively as the baronet explained that the large-boned red and white cows gave most milk, but that the smaller animals, especially those of fawn colour (shading at the neck into dove grey), were much better for cream and butter.

Hardres made Edith tell how she kept her herb garden in profusion for at least nine months, and Dover picked a sprig of thyme to remind him of her lesson. He hoped some day, he said, for the privilege of receiving Sir Valentine and Mistress Hardres in Hertfordshire.

"I cannot match your Kentish hop-gardens, but the orchards are worth observation. The rosery if you should come in summer would, I hope, give interest to Mistress Hardres. I would like to show my horses, too —I permit myself a boast about them. A stable of eight and apart from the King I know no one who can show such quality in saddle horses. If you had been much in London this last year you would have heard of my stallion 'Pegasus.'"

"A name for a rare horse."

"Wait till you see him." Dover's tone had a new animation: he was, whatever else, an enthusiast on horses. "Noble to the eye, and he has all the stamina and gentleness, speed as well when wanted. I rode him in that race—but I go beyond myself—you would not have learned of it."

"Do not baulk us of the story, my lord."

"Sir George Stamp challenged me for 500 guineas to a race twenty miles—he has a swift Arabian 'Sheba'—and scores of bets were made, 4,000 guineas, so they say. We rode from London to St. Albans—the road is fair. I was away in the lead for a mile or so, but the Arabian, which has a very easy action, caught me at Barnet. We pushed hard against each other, but for ten miles there

was not more than a hundred yards between us, one or the other leading. Then the Arabian went ahead, and five miles from St. Albans the mare had half a mile advantage. I spoke to 'Pegasus,' asked him if he was to be shamed—he had never before been beaten. He began to put on pace. We came up on the Arabian, travelling smoothly but showing signs of the long run. I spoke sternly to 'Pegasus,' gave him command now instead of coaxing. He understood. He took a firm hold of the bit and away we went. We passed the Arabian. Just before we reached the city, she made an effort but was spent. I pulled up 'Pegasus' at 'The Peahen' in St. Albans with the mare a hundred yards behind."

"A good rider I'll swear as well as a good horse," said Hardres. "What age is he?"

"Five. As fine a horse as I shall know, except that he is hard of mouth, a little slow in answering. He cost me a blow on the head not long ago; I could not move him quickly enough. Mistress Hardres will remember the occasion."

Dover smiled towards her and Edith raised a bunch of flowers to her face.

"You mean Mr. Godwyn?"

"Do they still seek him?" asked Hardres. "Or does he hide for nothing?"

Dover's face clouded, and he picked a piece of thistle-down from his coat before he replied. "I feared you might ask. He is, of course, your neighbour."

"Neighbour, yes," said Hardres, "but I knew little of him till these weeks past. A hot-head."

"In my temper that day I might have run him through, but I bear no malice. I have worse enemies to think of. Besides, I was once young myself."

"He is safe?" said Edith, and Dover looked at her.

"We would like to hear what you have to tell, Lord Dover," she went on. "Mr. Godwyn is a figure in these parts."

They had stopped in the shade of the walnut tree, fronting the house, and Edith bent down to pat Ringer, who had taken a seat on her foot.

"Prepare to be shocked," said Dover reluctantly. "Your squire is worse than a hot-head."

"Eh," said Hardres. Edith ceased patting Ringer and stood up to regard Dover with fear in her eyes which she could not cover.

"I thought him a mad-brained young farmer, in his crazy way meaning well to Mistress Hardres. I would have forgiven him after twenty-four hours of temper and a hasty search. The insult to the King meant that he had to be looked for in earnest, and his haunts were visited, his acquaintances examined, and before long some of his previous doings were stumbled on. An interesting rogue. He has courage."

"Rogue?" said Hardres. "I knew his brother was such."

"A pair yet differing in texture. The younger brother is a dare-devil, a spendthrift with never two thoughts on the morrow, yet all the same a wronged man. Tom Godwyn has his points, it seems. A first-class swordsman when he's sober, and in the Palatinate, young for a soldier, he earned high opinion from more than one commander. He was made a captain under Drouet before Barmstadt, led a party of twenty men on a forlorn hope, drove in through the postern gate and opened a way for the capture of the castle. 'Twas this exploit which saved him from hanging for stealing a gold necklace belonging to Mademoiselle Destrils, Drouet's mistress."

"A thief, so brave a man!" said Hardres.

"Tom Godwyn has some excuse. His brother, your neighbour the squire, has filched from him half of the estate of Ash, which, so say the lawyers, was left equally between the brothers."

"Harry Godwyn is the elder," said Hardres.

Dover shrugged himself.

"That's as may be. The upshot of it is—and I'll not trouble you with the legal forms—that by the decision of His Majesty in council the estate in Ash is forfeited and goes to Tom Godwyn in place of his brother."

"To be seized!" cried Edith. "To be taken away from him."

"The procedure matters little. The farm would come to the younger brother in a week or two. There is more to tell. The present squire of Ash has a life you know not of."

"I'll have no wonder left in me very soon," said Hardres.

"He is guilty of some other crime?" asked Edith.

"He had bad associates in London and has maintained them. His remote homestead has given him opportunity for an avocation more usually found in those who camp in the taverns of Alsatia. He takes the road as occasion warrants."

"The road!"

To Hardres, and to Edith as well, came swift memory of the episode on their way to London. Edith pushed the thought from her with contemptuous anger at herself, and Hardres, shocked, bewildered, held his silence.

"A painful story," said Dover; "a neighbour is a neighbour. I would have been happy to have avoided the mention of it."

"It has to be known," muttered Hardres. "It shakes me, yet I have disliked the young man."

"They will catch him?" said Edith in a thin voice.

"Unless he has left the country. The roads are searched. There is a look-out for him near London. A watch is to be set in the neighbourhood here."

"Damned if I like it," said Hardres with vehemence. "I hope he'll keep away, and no disrespect to you, my lord."

"I've small concern in the affair,—others carry out the law—unless indeed I should chance to be near at hand when he is taken. I could not then avoid the use of some authority. I share your hope he'll keep away from Kent."

"He may find his way abroad. I'd not be sorry."

"Possibly he'll slip through; chances increase for it, and the approaching discomposure may make malefactors of small account. I'm sorry to have had to tell you this about your neighbour."

"We must needs be staggered," said Edith, "but it is well we should know all."

She stood up straight, tapping the flowers in her hand against the side of her dress.

"Aye, it's well we should know," said Hardres. "What will Sandwich and the neighbourhood say?"

"You may not be troubled with further knowledge of him. Perhaps it would be the best outcome of the affair."

"I hope so, I hope so," said Hardres.

Edith forced a smile.

"We may at least put the squire from our thoughts to-day, father. We have the honour of Lord Dover's presence with us. Our village worries should be postponed."

"Gad! You're in the right, Edith. She teaches manners to her old father, Lord Dover."

"On me the blame for bringing such disturbing gossip. What of your stables, Sir Valentine?"

"I have a good creature in my stallion, 'Buccaneer.' He's worth a sight, though perhaps he'll not match with 'Pegasus.' There's the bay mare—and a yearling colt——"

"What of the dapple?" broke in Edith. "My own pony, Lord Dover. The best thing on four legs at Woodnesborough. He'll lie down when I tell him."

"You love horses?" said Dover with great interest.

"Dogs first, then horses."

"And after that poor human beings—like myself," said Hardres.

Edith shook her father by the arm.

"Would you lie down like 'Dapple' if I told you to?"

They all laughed together.

Hardres lost his depression about the squire in his surprise and satisfaction at the change in Edith. She had forsaken her restraint, a natural liveliness had come back to her, and she had become his competitor in welcome to their guest. If he had some puzzlement he pushed it on one side.

On the way to the stables, Dover explained that within an hour he must be starting back for Sandwich, and Edith swiftly backed her father's protest.

"I haven't heard nearly enough about what's happening in London and elsewhere, my lord."

"I planned to learn your opinion on root crops after wheat and oats," said Hardres.

"Alas, there are those at Sandwich who will be awaiting me. I have a busy time this evening."

"And our best bedroom specially prepared, father!" said Edith.

"We cannot interfere with Lord Dover's important work, my dear."

"Mistress Barton will be disappointed; there are trout and ducks for supper."

"You make my mouth water, Mistress Hardres, but I had intended to travel on to Dover in the morning."

"To-morrow."

"You give us but a passing call, my lord," said Hardres.

Dover pondered.

"I might relegate my duties for a day and ride over to-morrow for an hour or two. Too late this afternoon to talk on root crops and rotation, Sir Valentine. Also I wish to ask your counsel on hops. I'm trying hops in Hertfordshire. The ducks and trout will keep till to-morrow, Mistress Hardres?"

"If not there's a fat young turkey asking to be cooked."

"Be it so. I'll play traitor to His Majesty's affairs for a short period. My fealty is not proof—when Woodnesborough is in the balance."

"There is so much I want to hear from you," said Edith eagerly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

EDITH FACES TOM GODWYN

THE harvest in Kent had been a good one—a heavy yield of wheat and barley with fine weather for the carrying—and timely July rains had made the second cut of hay and clover almost match the first. Livestock shared the general well-being because of the plenitude of food. Old John Stanton of Worth sold seven of his steers not eighteen months old at three pounds eight shillings apiece, the highest price for young oxen Sandwich market had known for years. Some of the corn was threshed and sold and tradespeople found the benefit, to say nothing of busy tavern keepers. Joynson, the harness maker, with his two apprentices working by candlelight as well as in the daytime, talked of getting a journeyman; Springle, the carpenter, who mixed cart-building with barge-building, had work ahead up to Christmas, what with two new wains and three tip-carts to go to outlying farmers. Only one autumn out of five or more brought such busyness.

But Sandwich no more than any other town could shut out the story of agitations and alarms which trickled down from London, and towards the end of September talk of store cattle, winter provender, and the turnip crops became of less importance than guesses as to what the King would do in his hour of danger. Every market day produced its new sensation: troops were pouring in from Ireland, wild hairy creatures, Papists

to a man; William had already sailed from Holland, and Sunderland and Godolphin were in his pay; the Navy was faithful to James and would destroy William before he reached the English shore; the French king was sending soldiers.

Jeffery Sackett in his measured way reached the heart of the matter. "James has turned the country into a wasps' nest. He may come out in safety—who can tell?"

"There's plenty here don't want him to come out in safety," said Syme, the blacksmith.

"Least said soonest mended," replied the mayor. "At the smallest of it James has had a lesson."

Host Breming from "The Bell" shook his head doubtingly.

"Ye can't change a red bull into a dun cow. I reckon he'll keep his eye on Sandwich."

Jeffery Sackett laughed.

"We're but a pin-point, friend. Sandwich! Have ye never heard of London and Bristol, and Ipswich and Newcastle, and Nottingham and Plymouth?"

"Lord Dover was here but a month ago. And why do we get soldiers over from Canterbury once a week? Tell me that, Mr. Mayor?"

"Sandwich is chief of the Cinque Ports. Lord Dover is examining the garrisons. He had us mayors to talk with him while he was here, a somewhat silent gathering he found it, I fear. As to the soldiers, a routine scrutiny, so the sergeant tells me. They go to Deal and Ramsgate also."

"William might land at Deal or Ramsgate?" suggested Syme.

"Sandwich lies between the two," said the mayor.

The news and its exaggerations had echo at Woodnes-

borough Hall, where there was a better understanding of events than in the market square.

"You used to hate the Papists, father," said Edith.

"I hate them still, but I've seen war and you haven't. If James could but get sense—too late, now, I suppose——"

"He left his mark on you—'tis my eternal surprise."

"I see his faults, they're bad enough. Will people take to a foreign king, even Protestant William?—there's the issue to my mind."

"William has best part of England behind him already."

"Yet there was something in what Dover said about a foreigner."

"Father, in this hubbub Squire Godwyn will find his opportunity. These false charges will be blown away."

"If so be they're false. They seem far-fetched, but Dover was sober and positive that the squire'll not come back. A felon's a felon, be it King William or King James."

"You don't believe it," exclaimed Edith. "You know you don't."

"Why should he stay away? Why should Lord Dover lie to us?"

"A sense of duty!" said Edith, scornfully.

"You were complaisant when he told about it."

"I'd be complaisant again to learn his plans; he was too clever for me."

"A mixture that Harry Godwyn," said Hardres thoughtfully. "Ye'll hear no more of him, my girl."

The crash came three mornings later when Edith was in Sandwich and saw a group of townspeople assembled round the door of the Guildhall on which a newly-

printed placard had been affixed; she stood at the back of them and took in the words.

"*£50 Reward.*

"*Whereas Harry Godwyn, of Brook House, Ash, near Canterbury, in Kent, has been guilty of crimes against the King's peace, loyal subjects are hereby enjoined to secure the person of the said Harry Godwyn and to deliver him to the custody of the undersigned to await the King's pleasure. Any who give information leading to the arrest of the said Harry Godwyn will receive a reward of fifty pounds.*

"(Signed) JOHN HAYWARD (Colonel),
"His Majesty's Garrison,
"Canterbury."

There were whisperings and mutterings among the gathering, but Edith heard no word of what was said, was unaware that Bower, a jurat, tried to make a way for her, paid no heed to the white-faced Annie Sackett, who clutched her arm to say "This can't be true, Mistress Hardres." In a haze she forced herself to read the words again, then edged herself away. The friendly doorway of Dame Bolton's woollen shop gave her refuge and she stood for a minute trying to get her senses together.

Her puny efforts with Dover! Her childish hope and self-deception. She asked herself if in truth such malignity were possible. To pursue one man, and he of no great importance, to pursue him relentlessly while disorder, rebellion, war were at the gates—it seemed incredible. Yet there were the printed words, Dover's words, although another's name was placed beneath them. Perhaps she had encouraged him too far—and

the thought brought her new horror. She had a vision of the man's dark spirit, riding the storm, relaxing no hatred, leaving no debt unpaid. What chance had Harry Godwyn? She made a little prayer, a fervent prayer that he was well away from England, safe in Holland.

Edith went from the doorway of the woollen shop anxious to get away unseen, bent on reaching her father at Woodnesborough quickly, and it so fell out that she almost ran into the arms of Jeffery Sackett.

"This is terrible, Mistress Hardres."

"What's it mean? I'm in a whirl with it. He has an enemy——"

"The soldiers put that notice up—came from Canterbury on purpose. Enemy, you say. Yes, he's here—along at 'The Bell' ten minutes since."

"Who is it, Mr. Sackett? Not——"

"His own brother—who else?—Tom Godwyn."

"Tom Godwyn?"

"Come here to seize the farm."

"His brother!—with soldiers."

"Devil's work in London. They come when Harry's not around. They count the seizure may bring him, so I think. What plot's afoot against Harry Godwyn, Mistress Hardres? Let them lay a hand on him Sandwich won't be quiet, soldiers or no soldiers."

Edith had never seen Mayor Sackett so excited.

"Mr. Godwyn is surely safe for to-day; but the farm——"

"Tom Godwyn's on his way to Brook House by now. If I could do any good——"

Edith seized the mayor by the arm. "Mr. Sackett, could I have your pony? I might get there before him round by Woodnesborough."

"Have the pony and welcome, but what could you do?"

"Tomlyn ought to know—he shouldn't be taken without warning."

"You can be on the pony in three minutes, Mistress Hardres."

Edith did not spare the pony along the Woodnesborough road, and she went by the entrance to her home at a gallop which caused old Barton, raking up dead leaves just inside the gateway, to hurry to the house and seek his master. Before Sir Valentine was down at the road, Edith was within sight of Ash.

As she cantered up the avenue to Brook House she saw Jarvis, working in the farmyard, but there was no sign of Tomlyn, and she sprang up the steps and knocked loudly at the open door, and old Deborah came hastening from the kitchen.

"Where's Tomlyn, Deborah? Quick, quick, see who's coming up the avenue."

"The master!"

"Get Tomlyn," cried Edith in a frenzy. "No, it's not the master."

"Not the master? Lawks alive, it's Master Tom. I'll send Jarvis for Tomlyn."

"Is he near?"

"In the turnip field, over the hedge yonder. He's hoeing there."

Deborah made little of her substantial weight as she trotted across to the yard to despatch Jarvis on his errand. Before she reached him Tom Godwyn, riding up to the house, had recognised Edith, and whatever his surprise, he showed it not, and a dozen yards from her lifted his hat with easy respectfulness.

"Welcome to Brook House, Mistress Hardres. I am fortunate."

"I am on a visit to your brother's steward."

"Ah, what with the rheumatics and the like he gets very old. He has only Deborah——"

"I come to bring him news."

"News?" He looked at her enquiringly. "I too bring him news. He's on the way to us, I see. And here comes Deborah. Why, Deborah, you're getting plump."

"Master Tom, you here, in daylight too."

Tom Godwyn frowned.

"Careful, Deborah."

"They do say time for carefulness is gone, Master Tom."

"Eh?" The young man's tone was harsh enough now.

"What with this talking all about."

"Keep check on a wagging tongue, Deborah."

Tomlyn by now was climbing over the farmyard fence.

"What do you want here, Master Tom?"

The old steward came up, his battered hat thrust back to show his scanty hair, his eyes with no welcome in them. He breathed heavily after his hurry from the field.

"A little gruff, Tomlyn; you must alter that. I come here on my brother's affairs, and my own—a lengthy matter. We'll go into the house."

He made a movement to the door and then Edith broke in.

"I came to tell you, Mr. Tomlyn; I wasn't in time to see you alone. There's a reward of £50 posted at

Sandwich for the squire. His brother's here to seize the farm."

"What!"

"Not too prettily put," said Tom Godwyn, "I'll make excuses. A girl——"

"What's this about the master? Is it true you've sold him?"

The colour rose in Tom Godwyn. "I'll take my riding whip to you, Tomlyn."

"Oh, ah, but is it true?"

"Listen, you old boor. I've nought to do with this proclamation against Harry. I know they seek him. Is it happy for me, think you, to see my brother proclaimed a felon?"

"A felon—the squire!"

"Harry's misdeeds——"

"Misdeeds!" roared Tomlyn; "he's done no misdeeds."

"He's wronged me whatever else he's done, Tomlyn, and your loud noise takes nothing from it. You'd better hear me."

"You've come to take Brook House, have you?"

"Half of this place should have been mine. You've heard my father say he meant it so, Tomlyn."

"Aye, and what made him alter his mind?"

"He always meant it—spite of his spasms against me."

"Is that all you've got to say?"

"I have a document for you to read. It makes me owner."

"You owner—Brook House, the farm!"

"All of it. Escheated by the King in Council. Don't pretend you've not heard rumours. This is no great surprise to you, Tomlyn."

"You'd come here, you'd turn out the squire!"

"I'll not see him want, not but what he deserves a lesson. Let him win free from what hangs over him and he can find a home here."

"Oh, ah." Tomlyn's face was that of a stunned man.

"You know how he's stinted me. I'll show him how to be generous. My brother Harry shall manage the farm for me, live here, have half the profits."

"You'll not abide here."

"That's as happens. I shall look to the accounting. No trickery."

"There'll be no trickery," said Tomlyn.

"I am your employer from to-day. When my brother returns—if he does return—we'll have a fresh arrangement. I shall require to know about the stock in hand, also the corn. Have you done any threshing yet?"

"Fifteen quarters of wheat in the granary."

"You'll go to market this week, Tomlyn. Now into the house and you can see the paper."

He looked towards Edith.

"Mistress Hardres having heard so much should hear the finish. You'll come with us, Mistress Hardres? You needn't weep, Deborah; you're going to have a kind master——"

"Wait a minute," said Tomlyn, surlily. "I got something to show you before you come indoors."

He mounted the steps and went into the hall, and after a minute he reappeared with a fowling-piece on which he had put fresh priming. He held it half-raised; his pale-blue eyes were blazing.

"What this?" Tom Godwyn shot a glance at the pistol holster on his saddle, paces beyond his reach. "You've to look at this paper, Tomlyn."

"I'm looking at you, you black-hearted scoundrel."

"You old fool——"

"I'll count five. You'd thieve from your brother as well as put the hounds on him, would you?"

He raised the gun to his shoulder.

"Mr. Tomlyn! Mr. Tomlyn!" screamed Edith.

"Turn your face, girl; it's a just execution."

"Madman, would you do murder on me?" cried Tom Godwyn, as he scrambled to his horse.

"One—two——"

"These are Harry's orders."

"Three—four——"

Tom Godwyn did not let pride stand in the way of safety; he used his rowels. "I'll be back," he shouted.

Tomlyn kept the gun to his shoulder, squinting along the barrel till Tom Godwyn was three parts of the way down the avenue, and then he lowered the butt to the ground and turned to see Deborah collapsed in a heap with her face buried in her hands, and Edith, of a shake, regarding him with dread.

"Would you have shot him?"

Tomlyn made a grimace. "I can't rightly say; like enough I would."

"Thank God, he's gone."

Tomlyn forced himself to a grin.

"I reckon I only did it to frighten him."

"You frightened Deborah and me. I shan't sleep to-night."

"Would I have him here?" asked Tomlyn.

He took the gun indoors and returned to find Deborah on her feet with Edith comforting her.

"You talked of soldiers at Sandwich, Mistress Hardres?"

"Yes. They'll come here with him now. What will you do?"

"An hour will make a difference. Nay, I can't tell you more now."

"If I could help——"

"Best for you to get along home."

"What will happen? If the soldiers come——"

"I promise I won't try to shoot the soldiers."

Tomlyn walked over to her horse and led it to her.

"I want you away, Mistress Hardres. Could I see you at the Hall to-night? I've never been there yet."

"Nine o'clock I'll be waiting for you at the gate. You're sure you'll come to no harm, Mr. Tomlyn?"

"Not I. I'll tell you all there is to tell."

As she rode down the avenue she looked back and saw Tomlyn watching her.

When she was out of sight, Tomlyn turned to Deborah.

"Into the kitchen, Deborah, and don't poke your nose out here for ten minutes. Better take a drop of eau de vie."

"I need a drop of eau de vie," said Deborah, climbing heavily up the steps.

Tomlyn put two fingers in his mouth and whistled shrilly; he waited half a minute and repeated the signal. The door of the hayloft above the stables swung open and Harry Godwyn came out and descended by the wooden steps to the ground; he was followed by Bolney. The latter was picking pieces of hay from his clothes as they walked over to Tomlyn.

"We woke in time to see the end of it," said Harry. "We've been peering through a crack."

"These haylofts need more air in them," said Bolney.

"Soldiers at Sandwich; he's gone to fetch them, squire."

"I guessed misfortune when I saw him."

"We could hold them off," said Bolney. "You have some men——"

"We'll keep our plan," said Harry sharply.

"Daytime, squire. If they'd but given us to-night."

"Jarvis is in the turnip field. We'll trust him. Where are the others?"

"I sent 'em way off to Dratton Copse a-faggotting."

"Get Jarvis to put a horse in a tip-cart. We'll be in the bottom. Load dry fern on top of us. You can send some food and drink and a blanket or two after dark."

"And tell the worthy Jarvis to leave us a good air hole through the fern," said Bolney.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE GHOSTS AT ASH

TOM GODWYN returned to Brook House that afternoon backed by a sergeant and five troopers who dismounted and led their horses forward within earshot of a dialogue which promised entertainment. With the humiliation of an hour or two before fresh upon him, Tom Godwyn was rasping; his instructions and demands came out of him like pistol shots, and Tomlyn, a sullen old man with his back to the wall, growl as he might, could do no other than accept defeat.

"These soldiers to stay here or I'm sent flying?"

"You might be lying stiff with a bullet in your gizzard. I'm not saying how long I'll stand you."

"I'm no rat in a gin, mark that. I'll stop; the place can't go to ruin."

"If you lay a hand on a gun——"

"I'm put out of the way for good!"

"You would not be irreplaceable."

"Where am I to put these men?"

"They can camp in one of the barns; there's plenty of straw. Two of the horses can be tied up in the loose-box; clear the lumber out of the far stable for the others."

Tom Godwyn turned to the troopers, and Sergeant Goodyear, a lean-faced veteran, pushed his horse a pace or two forward.

"My steward will see that you and the men get

dinner and supper. You must make best shift you can for sleeping."

"I've known worse quarters, captain," said the sergeant, cheerily.

Sandwich hummed for a day or two with the seizure of Brook House and all that was likely to arise from it, and then came the new sensation which some were bold enough to say was a consequence and a warning; such things did not happen without a cause. With each fresh visitation the thrill deepened and spread, and farmers made sure their lower windows were securely shuttered at night, and labourers sought each other's company on their way home from the beerhouse after dark. Old women in every village for three miles around spoke their premonitions, and some gave recollections from long past of an evil spirit clad in white with a black face haunting the church at Eastry after the murder of Farmer Fishenden.

If the experience of Peter Syme had come alone it would have been enough to set tongues wagging for a week, but the blacksmith's adventure was but the beginning of a series which wiped out any suggestions of a temporary lapse from sobriety on the part of a steady churchgoer, a hard-working tradesman, and one, moreover, who had frequently asserted (against popular opinion) that a quart at a time was sufficient for any man. Syme had been out to do a job of ringing some sows at Fielding's farm, which lay half-way between Ash and Richborough, and evening had fallen before he had finished and he started to walk home with his box of tools slung over his shoulder in the gathering darkness. He was half a mile on his way when he was startled by what he at first thought was the screaming cry of a seagull winging ahead of him over the field on

his left. A minute later he came to a sudden stop as the sound was repeated: no seagull ever cried so poignantly as that; surely a human voice or the semblance of it.

Syme put down his box and scrambled across the ditch at the side of the road and through the adjoining hedge and looked out over the stubble. Despite the gloom he could have distinguished the form of man or woman for twenty yards or more: none was to be seen. He was pushing through the hedge to the road when the cry came again, this time from the field opposite. He hastened across and climbed a five-barred gate, from the top of which he could see over a stretch of fallow, and once more there was no sign of living creature. As he peered this way and that the cry arose almost at his feet, as though from the undergrowth which fringed the ditch. It was now a wail, very melancholy and piercing, and some words were to be picked out. "Death is here; death is near," and then followed moanings and horrid whistlings.

Syme dropped to the road, swung his box over his shoulder and started at a jog trot for Sandwich, and when he reached home, with the perspiration falling off his face, he hurriedly barred and bolted back door and front door. He occupied the next hour telling the story to his wife and drinking the best part of a gallon of beer to steady his nerves.

On the following night, Ward, the sexton of Ash Church, having spent an hour in the taproom of "The Red Lion," where Syme's experience had been the only topic—an engrossing and exciting one at that—went across the road to the churchyard, through which he had to pass on the way to his cottage, three hundred yards beyond in the dell. He was opposite the south door of

the church with the gravestones on each side of him showing up white in the darkness, when the sound of a droning voice checked him in his walk. A sturdy man of forty, he stood with his legs far apart to steady himself, an instinctive defence against man or devil.

"Who's there?" he called. For answer came a repetition of a doleful monotone, "Flee the doom; flee the doom."

"Come out! Who are you?" shouted Ward in quavering voice.

"They carry a curse, and they mean death." The words were in a kind of chant, and ended with a harsh laugh.

Ward turned and fled at the top of his speed back to "The Red Lion," where there were lights and friends.

"I've had but a pint and a half," he cried, as he burst in on the astonished gathering. "A pint and a half. You'll stand by that, Wilkins?"

He had lost his hat. Incoherently he blurted out his story. "I'm the sexton of the church, too. What have I done that it should come to me?"

"You'd best see the parson," said Wilkins, the landlord.

"Aye, best see the parson," said Dingle, the carpenter.

"What d'ye mean?"

"I've heard my mother tell of a like case," explained Wilkins. "'Twas down by the pound at Finglesham. The man who heard it lived three days."

"Give me a quart," said Ward, hoarsely, "a quart, and quick about it."

The manifestation on the third night not only silenced the few scoffers and gave fresh force to the storm of talk which was now arisen as far afield as Wingham; what happened severely shook the nerve of the garrison at Brook House, soldiers all, as it was pointed out, and

men not easy to be frightened. Jenkins, the youngest trooper, had been given the task of walking round the lanes near Brook House with instructions to keep his eye on the turnings that led from the main Canterbury Road. He was on foot and carried a carbine which he was to fire as a signal in case of necessity.

"You'll know him," said Sergeant Goodyear; "about the cut of Captain Godwyn. He may come along any of these roads. Don't get too far from the house."

The troopers were snugly burrowed in their straw in the barn, and two of them were already snoring, when there came the report of the carbine not a hundred yards away. Goodyear who, like his men, slept in shirt and breeches, was the first to get his boots on; he snatched a pistol which hung from a nail above his head and rushed out. The troopers followed a minute later to find him in talk with Tomlyn who, lantern in hand, was in the yard, half dressed. The steward was shaking.

"Have you shot somebody?"

"It's Jenkins," said the sergeant, "somewhere over there by the hop-garden."

"A bridle path runs along the other side of the meadow railings," said Tomlyn.

Other lanterns were forthcoming and the party went at a run across the grass under the trees. They found Jenkins lying on his back in the bridle path with the discharged carbine by his side.

"Dead!" exclaimed Tomlyn.

The sergeant, on his knees, thrust his hand into the man's breast. "He's not dead. Bring those lanterns close, and let's have a look at him."

They turned the inert man one way and the other, and tried to find where he was wounded, and then

Jenkins gave a feeble groan, and struggled to a sitting position.

"Thought you were shot," said Goodyear. "Who did it? Did he get away?"

The young trooper rubbed his hand across his eyes to collect himself. "I've seen it," he muttered.

"Seen it!"

"That there ghost."

They stood silent, the sergeant as well as the rest of them, for they had heard the stories of the past day or two, and were no more indifferent to supernatural dangers than the farm hands who, protesting they were "not afeared," were now taking care that the racking up of their plough horses was finished before darkness set in.

"I fired at him," said Jenkins.

"That's done it!" exclaimed one of the older troopers crossing himself.

"Pull yourself together, Jenkins," cried the sergeant. "What happened?"

"I was coming along here and I heard the sing-song coming out of the hedge. I steps back into the ditch against a tree and gets my gun ready. It was like somebody singing his curses. It come out of the dark along there where that patch of stinging-nettles is. There was something about death in it. I ups with my gun and fires where the sound come from, and then as I'm a sinner, it laughed and laughed and laughed. I got up into the path and the laugh went on—mocking-like. I was floppy, sergeant; I'm not used to ghosties. Then as there's a Heaven above me, I had a glimpse of him."

"Hell's cats," said the sergeant, and he uttered the words like a reverent invocation.

"A glimpse of him," repeated Jenkins, "a white

glimmer among the brambles on the right-hand side there, a flash of something white, nothing else, and while he was showing himself on one side of the path he was laughing on the other among the nettles. It was a ghostie all right. Things went dizzy with me."

Trooper Jenkins' adventure had the result that he and another of the soldiers disappeared from Brook House within twenty-four hours; and it was plain to the sergeant that those left behind were none too comfortable and that one more such experience would make him the only representative of the regiment at Ash.

Goodyear put on a bold face, spoke scornfully of bucolic horse-play, but all the same when he went forth on the round at night—no one of the men would go without him now—he took pistol and sword as well as carbine. At Canterbury, to pick two veterans as substitutes for the runaways, he spoke out frankly to Colonel Hayward. "Old uns or young uns, sir, no power on earth will keep 'em there if this goes on for a fortnight. You'll have to hang the regiment as deserters."

"We can ill spare any," said the colonel. "We're losing some from other causes. Curse your village ghosts."

"I wouldn't say that, sir," replied Goodyear, seriously.

Tom Godwyn came to Ash from London to try to force Tomlyn to fill a purse which had sunk low at the Groom-Porters, and he laughed contemptuously at the story when he heard it from Sergeant Goodyear.

"Simples! Who's at the bottom of the foolery?"

"No foolery, captain; you need to talk with those who've met it."

"There's other things than money for you to think of," said Tomlyn, grimly.

"Not a doubt about that, captain," said the sergeant.

"To come down here to such a bag of nonsense. A witch on a broomstick next."

The two men looked at him with unmoved faces; and Tom Godwyn was staggered in spite of himself.

"You know the secret," he cried, angrily, at Tomlyn. "Out with it."

Tomlyn replied slowly and without any feeling in his voice.

"At first I thought it was some of the Ash or Sandwich people all heated up at your coming to take the farm and trying to frighten the soldiers and you and everybody. Now I believe it's spirits."

"Have you both gone mad?"

"What have you done with the master, that's what I want to know?" exclaimed Tomlyn, abruptly.

"What's he done with himself, you mean."

"Ghosts! and there's plenty thinks like I do."

Tomlyn turned and picked up a milk bucket, and trudged across the yard.

Tom Godwyn stayed on at Brook House to clear up what he called a silly mystery and by the second afternoon he was both bewildered and bad-tempered. Nor was his discomposure due altogether to the fervent belief of the countryside that messages were coming from the unknown world. By this time he was known by sight and name to many who lived at Ash, Woodnesborough and Sandwich; one or two gave him a perfunctory recognition but for the most part men and women avoided him. He noticed at Sandwich that Host Breming of "The Bell" crossed the road so as not to have to speak to him; so did Jurat Bower. More than once along the roadside between the villages a labourer would climb a gate to get into a field in order not to meet him face

to face. On the farm at Brook House the men spoke when they were spoken to but with a hang-dog manner, and each was plainly glad to get away from him.

At night after supper, restless and disturbed, Tom Godwyn walked down between the trees to the road and with his back propped against the gate-post lighted a pipe. His thoughts were not pleasant company but they were more endurable out of doors than in, with the candles in the big living-room lighting up memories of his childhood—games with Harry, his mother with her needlework, his father snoring in the chair by the fire. He recalled how Harry taught him leap-frog over a stool, how his mother put her finger on her lips so that they should not wake their father. Where was Harry now? In Holland he supposed—best place for him.

Tom Godwyn's gaze fell on the thicket opposite which had served as hiding-place for his horse when on night expeditions to his brother. No more of that for him, thank Heaven. His home had become his home again, however uncomfortable for the moment. He knocked out his pipe and strolled back up the avenue towards the house. It was a still night and autumn leaves descended like occasional snowflakes, the smell of a couch fire drifted from a neighbouring field. In the meadow on each side rose the famous oaks, giant silent sentinels from the past: Tom Godwyn remembered how he had been thrashed for climbing one of them on his fourteenth birthday. They would be growing still when he and all his enemies were dust.

He came to a standstill. Was that a lantern which had appeared and gone again from over towards the railings by the hop-garden? Who at that hour——? His heart gave a leap and he beat down his fears. Then he stood, palsied, for full and clear burst out from

between the trees something between a cry and a tune mixed in with words there was no mistaking. "He comes, he goes; death awaits."

For a second Tom Godwyn swayed on his toes minded to race for the house, desperate with one thought—a hiding-place. Then he regained himself, called up his courage with an oath, and rushed desperately across the grass and as he ran there came to him a long, eerie chuckle, shrilling into laughter. With the sweat breaking from his forehead he struggled on to the tree from behind which had come the light; no one was there. He dashed to other trees, and then towards the railing which fringed the bridle path. The laugh retreated before him, and by the time he had reached the fence, he could have sworn no living figure was in the meadow or beyond it.

He went back into the house a disordered figure, his hat in one hand, a pistol in the other.

Goodyear and Tomlyn, who were in the kitchen, surveyed him with a curiosity in which there was a glimpse of satisfaction.

"So it's come to you," said Tomlyn.

Tom Godwyn put down his hat and his weapon on the table and smoothed his hair with his hand.

"I'm going up to London to-morrow. There's got to be an end to this affair."

"There'll be an end to it," said Tomlyn sombrely.

Lord Dover, in his office at Whitehall, two days later, put aside his work of examining papers from France with details of the Dutch preparations (the paquet boat from Holland being stopped) and gave audience to Tom Godwyn. He listened without interruption, and at the end he said, "Candles in hollow turnips and a borrowed

sheet. Why have you come to me about this rustic frolic?"

"I'm not made of stone. What's the good of that farm to me, what's the good of the money to me if the place is haunted?"

"I never thought you had many brains; I did not know you had the spirit of a mouse."

"All very well for you, you haven't heard the cursed thing. I'm not the only one. What of that trooper?"

"I still do not understand why you should come to me."

"What would happen if I gave up Brook House?"

"Brook House has been escheated by the Crown on account of the felony of your brother. I saw that it came to you. If you choose to forfeit the property it falls to the Crown, and that would suit me just as well as your possession of it, perhaps better."

Tom Godwyn glared.

"I'll not stand this from you."

"You should have been as bold when you saw the ghost."

"Tell me this, Lord Dover, have you killed my brother? Your cold looks don't deceive me. Why else do these messages and noises come? Some say it's you and some say it's me. I've laid no hand on Harry."

Dover looked at Tom Godwyn thoughtfully. "Talking, are they? You're scared beyond yourself, Godwyn. I've done no injury to your brother. How comes it my name is joined to the affair?"

"D'ye think that old rattletrap Tomlyn keeps silent?"

"Hardres and his daughter are still at Woodnesborough?"

"Far as I know. What are they to do with it?"

Dover rose from his seat and sighed as he looked

down at the litter of papers on his desk, the French dispatches, and long letters from Halifax, commissions to raise new regiments, accountings for horses, a list of the officers in Barwick's regiment who had laid down their arms.

"Lindsey must do his best till I return, I suppose." He fingered some of the documents and made a note on one or two of them.

"Godwyn, I travel with you to Kent. We start in two hours' time."

"I wasn't thinking of going back."

"It does not suit me to be regarded as the assassin of your brother. You are my host. No one at Brook House will recognise me—I'll have another name."

"People at Sandwich——"

"Sandwich will not see me. Take quill and paper and describe to me exactly the neighbourhood round Ash —within a mile or so."

Before the pair made ready to start for Kent, Dover had mastered the lie of the country about Brook House and the farm, where the coppices were and isolated cottages, also the position of the intertwining lanes and roads—so far as they could be roughly drawn by Tom Godwyn. He did not explain why he wished for the information beyond saying ghosts were not so independent of material considerations as some people were inclined to think. On the way down Tom Godwyn underwent further examination.

When they arrived at Brook House, Tom Godwyn told Sergeant Goodyear that ghosts had no terrors for his old friend Captain Monkton.

"Wait till he meets the ghost," said Goodyear.

If Captain Monkton had no fears, he was at least full of inquisitiveness and in the next few hours he had

heard all that Goodyear, the troopers, and the men on the farm had to tell. They were ready enough to talk. Next morning the guest explored the surroundings of Brook House, orchard, meadow and gardens, and then under the guidance of Tom Godwyn walked farther afield, made a circle of the lanes.

For two nights in succession he went off by himself for hours, and told nothing of his movements except that he had been watching and waiting for ghosts who seemed determined to escape him. On the third night he was away even longer than usual, and the clock was nearing midnight when he came in to Tom Godwyn who, smoking and drinking to pass the time, had sat waiting up for him in the kitchen. Dover's cloak was muddied, and pieces of grass were sticking to it, the candle in his lantern which he had taken forth unlighted was burned down an inch. He had a good-humoured look on his face as he flung himself into a chair.

"Godwyn, I could eat a piece of bread and cheese or a slice of chicken. Cold and cheerless through the fields."

"You've seen something!"

"I've laid your ghost if that is what you mean. Let's have the food."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

LORD DOVER CONFESSES HIMSELF

"I REGRET very much that my father should be gone to Deal to-day; it is his weekly visit, my lord."

Dover, standing, bridle-rein in hand, observed the flush in Edith Hardres's cheeks, and her partly-hidden agitation, and knew not whether to be glad or sorry that her father was away.

"I had hoped to bring Sir Valentine and you the latest news."

"Father will be back this evening and if you are at Sandwich he might come there."

"This evening may find me on my way, Mistress Hardres, yet I am not certain."

He stroked the neck of his horse in thought.

"I could act as newsman. Will you not enter for awhile! I will have your horse cared for."

"I would be happy for a talk with you, Mistress Hardres."

He understood the compunctions which were working in her, the doubts of him. The past was not yet dead.

Turmoil was in Edith Hardres's breast, and he little knew its sources, despair at the sight of him, suspense at his first words, fears to hide, deadly suppositions which continued to shoot through her.

She motioned him to her father's chair near the fire-

place, and found a place for herself on the settle by the window.

"They're taking waggon-loads of faggots for the beacon at Walmer," she said; "we hear talk of the militia assembling."

"Fragments of militia are here and there; the gamble is whether, when William comes, they will mass strongly or scatter. Yet James has refused the offer of the French King to lend him troops against the Dutch. He trusts the people."

"Is the danger near?"

"Any week, any day. The Dutch have sixty sail of men-of-war besides flat-bottomed boats and tenders; sixteen thousand men are on board besides seamen, thousands of saddles and furniture for horses, and a vast treasure of money. Their printing house at Amsterdam is very busy making proclamations for English distribution."

"King James, all of you, must have great anxieties."

"Greater than appears. Several regiments of our forces are drawn towards the sea coasts in the south; new commissions are being given out for raising foot and horse with all expedition. We're beating up for volunteers in town and country; we're paying twenty pounds apiece for horses and that makes for some favour with the farmers. We have a good train of artillery preparing in the Tower. Do I weary you with these details? They make up my days and nights at present."

"My father is anxious; he will wish for all I can remember from you, my lord. He will ask if Kent is threatened."

"Some say the landing will be in the north, about Bridlington, others at Yarmouth, and some say Scotland. For myself I think William lands in the south.

The King intends to set up his standard at Blackheath."

"One day 'tis all alarms with us; the next come rumours that the King's concessions have defeated William in advance, and the Prince will meet swift disaster if he lands."

"Only children deceive themselves. The issue—who knows? I would not overpress the affair; it's serious enough. Sunderland will be dismissed this week; he is a traitor. Godolphin is suspect. There are perhaps half a dozen of us of whom the King may feel certain, but not more. We have several regiments; I put no reliance in them, the temper of England is capriciously against us. I know it and by God is not that all the more reason I should stand by James?"

His eyes sparkled, his voice had a ring in it. He raised his hand, as though in apology for his outbreak. "I note signs of crumbling in the militia; I have said so. Yet, withal, a devoted band of thousands may turn the tide. It has been done before."

"If all around the King feel as you feel, my lord ——"

He threw up his head with a smile. "I have been frank with you, Mistress Hardres. We are not frank with one another at Whitehall. Hard work, calm faces and desperateness have turned the odds e'er now. I have a reason for giving you the truth of it."

"My father will be much disturbed. I would that he were here to converse with you."

"Tell your father what you wish, the whole. But what I have said, what I have to say is designed for you, Mistress Hardres."

She rose in her dismay, and Dover stood up too and put out a pleading hand.

"I beg of you to take no offence. I can calm you.

Every single word I utter in your presence would have been said with your father here. I would desire you should inform him when he comes. Is not that sufficient? "

Dover's lean face showed an intensity rarely to be discerned through his iron temperament; his burning eyes were deep set, the muscles played about the corner of his mouth; his very earnestness set Edith in a tremble, though she spoke out bravely.

" What more have you to tell me, my lord? "

" Will you not sit again? "

She took no heed of his request and he bit his lip and sighed.

" I am more of a coward this moment than I have known since I first smelt gunpowder. I am whelmed with work, and intrigues; all may come to an end in a month or so, yet I could not keep myself from that which has embraced me and holds possession. I would have delayed, but I am forced. I cannot go on now to whatever may await me without disclosure."

Edith in some impulse she could not explain turned and took her place on the settle. Dover bowed low.

" I have been a callous man with women; I make no excuses; they would be foolish. I am turned fifty. I am awkward in what I have to say. Will you believe me—I pray that you will—from the minute I set eyes on you I was like a starving man who did not know he had been starving. Happy and miserable have I been from then to now—miserable that a life, full enough as some would think, should have been so empty, so unknown, so cast away. I could never tell you the surprise of it. Happiness! You will not be able to conceive it, this man of years and hardness and past amours found a well of delight in him which was very

pure and refreshing. Of what use regrets? Harry Jermyn with so evil a reputation—he deserves some part of it—would wake at night and wonder why he felt so happy. It was because a woman was alive and in the world, though perhaps for ever out of his reach. I wanted you. I would have committed most crimes to secure you. Aye, but beyond such selfishness I had the loveliest and softest inspirations. Every tiniest piece of memory, the little wrinkles round your eyes when you laughed——"

He checked himself and took a breath; Edith sat with eyes cast down gripping her hands together firmly.

"Unworthy! Madam, I'll not disguise it. I would have seized you. Mad, yes. Ah, my dear, believe me I've tried to find a better way. I thought to show you presently that there were other sides to me. This business with the Prince of Orange has developed with a swiftness unthought of. In the attractions between men and women the wind bloweth where it listeth. I do not look for a miracle and yet one might happen."

He stood in silence and presently Edith raised her eyes.

"It is impossible, Lord Dover."

There was a space before he spoke.

"Am I too old?" he said at last.

"Years have nothing to do with it."

He paused again and then said, "Is there another man?"

"It would not alter matters."

"Yet it might. Mistress Hardres, be patient if I seem to be impertinent. Is there aught between you and this young man Harry Godwyn?"

"I think you may ask that. There is nothing at all between Mr. Godwyn and myself."

Dover rose from his chair and stood looking through the window into the garden.

"Yet you are concerned about his fate?"

Confidence came back to Edith. "I am truly concerned. He was an acquaintance; partly for my father's sake and mine he took some risks. He has been made a victim. He is in flight for his life. It is natural that I am concerned, Lord Dover."

"You wish help for him?"

"I would do anything I could to help him."

"It was but a week ago the King issued fourteen pardons to different people who were liable to arrest for various crimes, part of his clemency to ameliorate general feeling. It might not be hard to secure another pardon."

"What are you saying, my lord?"

"I came down here to Kent to find out about these mysterious ghosts which are terrorizing simple folk. You know the old Roman ruins at Richborough, Mistress Hardres?"

"I know them well."

"Embattlements of masonry, hidden caverns, rough escarpments overgrown with brambles and bushes and the whole a mile away from any house."

Edith nodded. She could not find a word.

"Last night I lay concealed between some blocks of flint and brick on the top of one of the old walls from whence I could see over the encampment. It was about nine o'clock when from amid the tall grass and nettles in the middle of what was the old courtyard I could see two figures moving. They rose to their feet and though in the darkness I could not tell who they were, I saw that each carried a white wrap of some kind. When they had disappeared northward, presumably to frighten

the life out of some wretched farmer, I went across the courtyard where the vegetation gave cover and there, concealed by large turves and pieces of rock, I found the entrance to a tunnel, a tunnel made 1,500 years ago by the Romans and leading to I know not where. It was bricked in, about five feet high and four feet wide, and I lit my lantern and explored it for a little distance. I found within it two straw mattresses, men's clothes, some weapons, cooking utensils, the fragments of a meal and a score of candles—a nook and hiding place. I came out to a spot amid the nettles a dozen yards away whence I could observe the return of the two who had gone forth. They came back about eleven o'clock and were chuckling together. I could not distinguish their words. They lighted a candle in their lantern at the entrance to the tunnel and I had a sight of their faces. They were Harry Godwyn and Richard Bolney. Those two have been the ghosts of Ash, Mistress Hardres."

Edith laid her hand on the casement to support herself. "You have him at your mercy."

"The soldiers must take him to-day."

"At your mercy," she repeated.

"Is it natural that I should spare him? Would you ask it?"

Edith threw away all restraint. "I would ask it," she cried impetuously. "Why should I not? What's Harry Godwyn to you? Why do you pursue him? Why cannot you be generous? You say there are other sides to you: show me, show me now."

"I am hard driven, Mistress Hardres, otherwise I could not say this. Give me your friendship, let me have the chance to show you that I have that within me of which you may be proud, let me see you some-

times, give me the faintest spark of hope for the future. Do this and I'll pledge you that I go back to London, secure a king's pardon for Harry Godwyn, and see him reinstated in his home forthwith."

"That is your offer?"

"Is there else that I can say?"

"You would make a bargain with me?"

"I ask a gracious favour."

"My lord, is this your generosity?"

"I am begging you to be generous. Do not for ever keep me from your side. Is that so much to ask?"

Edith's voice had no wavering in it.

"I could not do what you wish to save Harry Godwyn or any other man. What you ask of me would be more than you have said. Harry Godwyn must take his chance. I do not love him so much that I would promise to marry Lord Dover in order to save him."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE SECRET OF RICHBOROUGH

THE grey morning gave promise of rain, and in the windless air the few remaining leaves on the trees dropped slowly one by one; sparrows chirruped bravely from holly bushes; an occasional ploughman at work among the stubble but added to the sense of loneliness which late autumn always brings to farming land. Dover riding back to Ash turned a gloomy eye on the countryside stripping itself for winter.

He asked himself what else he had expected, and yet could not escape the pang and ache of it. No hope! Aye, she had made that plain enough. Nor was it just indifference. She had played her part with civil face and tongue, had led him on, and at the end not even a kind word. Contempt! He stormed within himself as he recalled her manner. Contempt of Harry Jermyn!

Tom Godwyn was leaning against the gatepost of the farmyard lazily watching the men prepare a foundation of faggots and straw along by the southern wall for the turnips which were ready to be carted, and in response to Dover's whistle, went over to him at the door and followed him into the house. He listened with astonishment which changed to amusement.

"It's like Harry."

"I take your brother this morning," said Dover.

"Take him! Suppose he fights?"

"I take him this hour, dead or alive."

"You'll do it without me," said Tom Godwyn sullenly.

"I bring them here, clap them on to horses and off they go to Canterbury."

"You can't bring him here. Suppose he's——"

"I bring him here."

"Ods man——"

"You'll have two horses saddled waiting for us," said Dover and he walked over to the door.

Tom Godwyn, watching him, dropped an oath, and went to the kitchen and drew himself some beer.

Dover passed across to the barn where the soldiers were filling an hour by the leisurely rubbing up of harness and a brightening of metal work, and called Goodyear apart. Half a dozen sentences told the story.

"On foot. Leave the horses here. Each to see to fresh priming for his pistol."

The troopers as they made their preparations were noisy with gossipings, in good spirit that the mystery was over, and not one among them but anxious to declare he had never believed this fine fuss about the ghosts. Ghosts, indeed! As they adjusted bridles and saddles and buckled on their swords they joked of the tale to be told in camp that evening.

Tomlyn heard the raised voices, and stood regarding the commotion. He noticed that after Goodyear had had a word with Dover one of the troopers unhooked some hempen cord from a nail on the side of the barn.

"Here, what be ye at?" shouted Tomlyn, as he hurried over to Dover. "What be doing with my plough reins?"

"Cut them up," said Dover to the sergeant; "five or six feet lengths."

"New plough reins!" protested Tomlyn. "You can't cut up new plough reins. Only had 'em this summer. What d'ye want to cut 'em up for?"

Dover turned full on the steward.

"The cords are to bind your master and his companion."

"Bind the master!"

Tomlyn was like one stricken.

"We're going to fetch them from their hiding place at Richborough. Comfortable enough you made them —mattress, blankets, food and all. Miscreant, you were in this business."

"Me! May you be forgiven——"

"You'll come with us. I'm not sure you won't join them."

"How could the master be at Richborough? My lord you must be in error. You'll do no good by going to Richborough."

"A pretty game you've had between you," said Dover. "You're ready, sergeant? Get up there with the men, Tomlyn."

The way to Richborough lay past the hop garden, and then by lane and bridle track with many turnings; the mile and a half as the crow flew was a good two miles on foot, and Tomlyn had good time to learn from Sergeant Goodyear all that Lord Dover had found out the night before.

"He can't be at Richborough. Would I not have known it?"

"Ye're an artful one, Tomlyn," said the sergeant amiably.

"Listen, sergeant, there's no squire at Richborough and I'll tell you for why. Tom Godwyn's killed the

master, and the master's ghost is round here. We've said it before."

"You're a faithful one, Tomlyn. We'll know the truth of it soon. I reckon this is Richborough we're coming to."

"Aye, this is the place," said Tomlyn heavily.

Fourteen centuries before Richborough had been a hill peninsula, at once a port, an encampment and a castle. The sea had receded but the enduring work of the Romans still crowned the spreading eminence with jagged, circling walls which could be seen for miles across marshes, meadows and fields. Twenty to thirty feet high were these walls, all of them yards thick, and at their foot was the fosse thick with nettles and brambles. On the south side a landslip had taken the masonry, or the greater part of it, to the marshy flat below, and overgrown hillocks showed where bricks and stones were entombed. Ash and alder, blackthorn and bramble, with long grass and fern, covered the rough cliff-side, which descended steeply for a hundred feet or more. The acres within the walls were dotted with green banks, with rock-like masses of cemented brick, remnants of buildings dismantled by time, and nearly everywhere was rank undergrowth, mostly nettles and docks, some of them breast high. Cattle from the marshes wandering through one or other of the three gateways had trodden tracks through the growth; what had once been a seat of government for most of England was now a waste—deserted, the home of many rabbits.

Dover brought the party to a halt outside the gateway on the northern side, and sharply gave his orders.

"They're in a cave covered by two or three flat stones which they draw into position when they're inside.

Four men to stand in a semi-circle some yards back with their pistols ready. One man can help the sergeant and me to remove the stones."

"Suppose they don't come out?"

"They'll come. Let the men gather an armful each of dried bracken—they can get it in the sheltered spots. We'll heap it up near the entrance."

"You'd burn 'em alive," cried Tomlyn.

"I'll singe them a trifle, if need be," said Dover.

"May God forgive you, Lord Dover."

"Let the men get the bracken, sergeant," said Dover.

It was Dover and the sergeant who went forward first, picking their way to the hiding place; their pistols ready, Dover being in advance.

"They're here; the stones are in place," said Dover.

He turned and beckoned to the men behind, who straggled up with their arms full of dried litter with which, under the sergeant's directions, they made a pile on one side of the entrance to the tunnel. Then they drew back into positions around and Goodyear went up to each one and examined the priming of the pistols. Tomlyn stood a dozen paces behind the soldiers looking on in a kind of despairing blankness.

"When these men come forth," said Dover, "the three of us will bind Godwyn. Hold the other with your pistols till we're ready for him. If either makes a break through you are to shoot."

Dover lent a hand in removing the slabs of stone which blocked the tunnel entrance, and when they were lifted clear a flight of three or four steps leading downwards was seen; beyond was darkness.

"Light the lantern," said Dover.

"You're never going in, my lord."

"I'll have a word with them. There's the bracken if they're obstinate."

"They'll murder you."

"Give me the lantern," said Dover impatiently.

With the light in his left hand and a pistol in his right he crouched down and thrust his way into the entry, and disappeared from sight. For a full minute the watchers stood around, their nerves a-stretch waiting for some sign; not a sound came from out the tunnel.

Goodyear on his knees peered down the steps and could perceive a dim reflection from the lantern. "Is all well, my lord?" he shouted and in reply came an indistinct mumbling from Dover yards away underground. Goodyear with a word to the troopers to be on their guard, doubled himself up and crept into the opening.

Another minute passed and the watchers were set on edge by a scrambling from within the tunnel and every man levelled his pistol. Dover's head and shoulders appeared, and he crawled out, his coat and hands soiled, his face red with stooping. Close behind him came Goodyear, carrying the lantern, a startled man if ever there was one.

"Not there, and not a mark they've ever been there," he said, for the benefit of those around.

Dover frowned vexedly in thought while Goodyear stretched to relieve cramped limbs.

"A plain bricked passage with a dead end, not a turning, not a corner. What's your thought about it, Goodyear?"

"Another hole somewhere, my lord. This is the wrong one. If not——"

"If not, there are ghosts at work!" said Dover with rising voice. "I'll need more sober reasons. There's

the spot I lay among the nettles. I remember these very stones; I saw the two balance them, so that the last to enter might pull them into place."

"It was dark, my lord."

"Dark, you fool! I went inside, I had a lantern. 'Twas this same passage—only lined with their belongings, clothes and boots, a mattress, blankets, a loaf, a piece of meat——"

"Not a crumb, not a thread, not a straw from their pallet."

"I saw the men, I tell you."

The soldiers had drawn near and one, bolder than the rest, spoke out.

"How did they know, how did they go so clean away?—if so be if they was ever there."

"Get your distance, you and all of you. Who asked your word?"

Temper was mounting in Dover; he read a creeping doubt among the group, and then, as his eye fell on Tomlyn, an idea came to him.

"Where were you last night when I was out? You followed me. You knew what I had seen. You warned them."

Tomlyn was dull of eye. "I'm not afeared of you, Lord Dover, 'tis you should be afeared. No mortal being can account for what you saw last night and what you see to-day. Best reckon up your sins, Lord Dover."

"I'll reckon yours first, you old he-devil. I'll——"

Then arose a sound which stilled all talk, turned the troopers to stone, blanched the face of Goodyear, caused Dover to twist round in jerky fashion with his hand on the hilt of his sword. Some said afterwards the voice came from the walls, others the fosse beyond.

High pitched and melancholy, the song rose and fell like a dirge.

"The wind killed them,
The rain beat upon them;
Worms will eat them;
Death lies in wait."

The last word developed into a screaming cackling laugh.

A moment only and Dover had found his tongue, and if he had to force himself, if his voice had a crack in it, his command rang out loud and scornful.

"Scatter and find them. They're hidden here."

Not one obeyed him; the troopers were huddled together, an older man was clutching the sleeve of a companion; Goodyear's pistol had dropped to the ground.

"They're here, I tell you; you scared fools," roared Dover.

"Aye, they're here," said Tomlyn solemnly.

Again came the voice.

"Each to his grave;
Cowards or brave,
Who then can save?
Death in their faces."

No laughter this time, a sobbing and moaning in its place. The troopers were not rooted any longer. They sped for the gate like men possessed, falling over each other in their panic.

"The last shall be first,
All are accurst——"

Sergeant Goodyear could stand no more. "Wait for me," he cried to Tomlyn who was shuffling along after the soldiers, his hands clamped to his ears.

All had disappeared through the gateway out on to the cart-track which marked the old Watling Street, and Dover remained upright and motionless in the middle of the deserted encampment. Silence had descended on the ruins; no breeze made a rustle in the herbage, no bird twittered from the bushes. The riven massive walls were not more still than the desolation they encompassed. The solitary listening man turned this way and that. Suddenly from a clump of furze came a shrill loud squeak; a stoat had taken a rabbit by the throat. Dover set out for the gateway at as good a run as any of the others.

CHAPTER THIRTY

A SPY IN THE CAMP

THE hazel thicket, which faced the entrance to Brook House on the other side of the road, straggled southwards in the direction of Sandwich, a mere strip to begin with, but widening as it progressed, and within half a mile changing to woodland, with oaks and beeches rearing themselves high above the brush. Fringed by gorse, and with bracken a yard high in the clearings, the coppice was seldom invaded, except for the periodical faggotting. In a hollow where a great oak had been uprooted years before, a shelter had been constructed with a rick-cloth stretched across from bank to bank to keep out rain and wind; within was a thick bedding of straw; blankets were there, cloaks, spare boots, a sack with some food in it, and a drinking horn.

Sitting cross-legged, Bolney was feeding a fire beneath an iron cooking-pot with dry sticks, and Harry Godwyn perched on a hummock nearby was rubbing some rust specks off his sword with a piece of cloth and sand.

"I thought him vanquished, Harry. My conceit is pricked. That lovely arpeggio of mine, my grace notes too—all wasted. Yet Lord! how they ran—he too."

"I'm lost at his persistence. Has the King no work for him? Why should he come at me again? Curse it, Bolney, he's no such deadly grudge against me."

"Bunting may but seek guineas from his friend so newly rich."

"Ten miles, yes, not seventy. He's sent here by Dover."

"He'll soon lose his zest for country life. I've a cadenza which will touch his nerves."

Harry Godwyn stood up and ran a finger down the edge of his blade.

"If we could but have joined Devonshire in Nottingham?"

"Seek no more trouble, lad. We have food and drink, thanks to the worthy Tomlyn. Our bed might be improved, but 'tis sufficient. And if one escape the deadly rheums of Kent—why, in a fortnight, we emerge as conquerors. According to old Robins 'tis but a fair wind that's wanted."

"My brother sits there in my place. From him it all arises."

"Pity you hadn't had some sense, Harry."

"The day that William lands I'm to the house and out he goes. I handle him myself."

"A pleasure we can think of. I have more immediate ambitions. What of these rats that run across our straw at night? I'm a fastidious man."

"You shouldn't eat your supper sitting up in bed—even though your bed's but straw. Crumbs, Bolney—there's the secret."

Harry Godwyn and Bolney as they buried themselves in the straw that night had cause for talk about something more than the rats which occasionally disturbed them. Tomlyn had failed to make his usual visit after dark, and sleep did not come near them for hours while they went to and fro with surmise. "Nought but danger to ourselves could have kept him from the

wood," said Harry. Bolney feared that Tom Godwyn and Bunting had put the steward under lock and key.

"If they've done the old man any harm——!" said Harry.

"I'd not trust that Bunting."

"I'd not trust Tom."

"We've been here a week. Bunting's at Brook House five days. Yesterday he rode to Canterbury."

"Hayward and his regiment are under orders for the north, and besides you'd never get those soldiers here again; they'd rather face the Prince of Orange."

"Canterbury's in a line for London."

"Why should Bunting return to Ash?"

"Wisdom will come in the morning, Harry, let's give the rats a chance."

But the morning brought no solution, nor any word from Tomlyn, and Bolney found consolation in that they still had half a gammon of bacon and a gallon of beer.

"I've a mind to get up through the thicket and take a look at the farm," said Harry.

"We'll get news this evening. We've enough to do cutting grass to go on top of our rick-cloth."

"We'll need no concealment here for long. I'm sick of it. On my own land! And what's wrong about Tomlyn?"

"Give it one more day, Harry."

"Not another day. Before nightfall I'm up to look at the farm."

"A wilful man," sighed Bolney. "Meanwhile we'll get on and cut some grass." He went over to the shelter and brought out two sickles.

Bolney was at the foot of the bank passing up armfuls of green litter to his companion who was spreading it

evenly over the rick-cloth when Harry suddenly stopped his work and held up a finger, and then quietly slid down the bank to Bolney's side.

" Someone coming."

Harry pointed to the thick undergrowth on the further side of the bare space which fronted their retreat. Without a word Bolney hurried to their bedding of straw and brought back pistols.

" Six feet apart," he whispered, " they can't get us at a rush."

They stood with weapons ready, straining their ears, but all that came to them were the faint autumn noises of woodland, the occasional soughing from the tree-tops, the fall of a dead stick dismembered by the night touch of frost, the murmurs of brown leaves. Whoever came had halted but not for long. Within half a minute the two men heard plainly the swishing of twigs, cautious footfalls on the leaf-strewn ground.

" I'll take the first one," said Bolney.

" Let them into the open first."

A blur amid the rods of hazel, a stooping figure pushing through with difficulty, and then between the lacery of branches, the tall grass and bits of bracken, a girl in a grey cloak and hood.

" Mr. Godwyn ! "

" Mistress Hardres," cried Bolney.

" Tomlyn gave me the way, but I've been all round. I must have wasted half an hour or more."

" This is dangerous for you," said Harry.

" For my part I'd never discourage Mistress Hardres from doing aught she wished to," said Bolney. " I've enormous faith in her."

She gave him a twinkling smile.

" Even in a Kent wood Mr. Bolney maintains himself. Mr. Godwyn, I've come to warn you."

" They're after us? "

" Tomlyn discovered that Captain Bunting had followed him, knew where you were hid. He intended to trap Bunting last night. Then Lord Dover arrived again at Brook House."

" Dover! " exclaimed both together.

" This morning he was joined by four soldiers from London. He had come ahead of them."

" His own men this time," said Bolney; " no louts from Canterbury."

" Four soldiers, himself and Bunting, that makes six."

" Tomlyn dare not come to you last night because he knew he would be watched. This morning he sent Jarvis over with a note asking me to meet him on the road near Marshborough, and I was there when he came along driving two cows, with Bunting and a soldier a long way behind him. You are to get away quickly. They may come to the wood to-day; they will be sure to come to-night."

" We're away this hour," said Harry.

Bolney walked to Edith, made a formal bow and bent to kiss her hand. " Thanks to a brave lady," he said.

She waved her hand gaily. " Hurry, hurry."

" Where are we to go, Harry? At least we need a place to make a stand."

" There's a thatched hovel used for the cattle in the dip this side of Hamwold. It's not a mile away. We shall have to be in the open though, to get there. If we could reach Sandwich—no, it's too far."

" Our old quarters at Richborough? "

" Dover will think of that at once."

"Listen," said Edith. They stood at attention, and through the whispers of the coppice came the distant barking of dogs, a man's voice, a confused squattering noise which might have been horses' hoofs.

"The dogs always bark like that when horses leave at Brook House, Bolney."

"Time we were moving."

"We'll try our luck and make for Hamwold."

Edith was in front of them now, all eagerness and life.

"You'll come with me. I have a good plan. I know where to hide you."

"Where is that?" asked Harry.

"Where should it be? At Woodnesborough Hall."

"Heavens, Mistress Hardres."

"Splendid!" said Bolney.

"You don't understand, Bolney. Woodnesborough Hall——"

"They'll never seek you there," said Edith quickly. "We go straight down to the end of the wood; it takes us towards home. We'll have to cut across some fields, but the hedges give shelter. If any cottagers see us I must make shift to stop their mouths."

"But have you thought——"

"Oh, hasten, hasten." She stamped her foot on the ground.

"Get your cloak, Harry. Once in a way a beautiful woman has brains. I'm all for Mistress Hardres."

"It'll put them off the track, but what of Sir Valentine?"

He went and fetched his cloak.

"Down through the wood in front," said Edith. "I'll go first. Best keep cover though 'tis slower."

"I'm thinking of Sir Valentine," came from Harry as soon as they were on their way.

"I've not decided whether to tell him or not. There's no necessity."

"Maybe you ought to tell him," said Harry anxiously.

"Maybe you ought not to tell him," said Bolney decidedly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

DOVER STRIKES HOME

"AN army's coming up to the house, Sir Valentine, soldiers with swords, all fierce-looking on horses."

Mrs. Barton, fruit basket in her hand, rushed in to the library where her master was busy with his account book.

"An army!" Sir Valentine in a fluster, with some vague sudden notion that the Dutch invasion had become a fact, hastened over to the window to see approaching Lord Dover with four troopers and a scarecrow of a man on a horse to match.

"Lord Dover! Where's your sense, woman?"

"They frightened me so many of 'em. I didn't see 'twas Lord Dover. We've little that's cooked in the house, Sir Valentine—and me busy this morning putting away apples in the loft——"

"They'll not stay. A friendly salutation of his lordship on the way to Sandwich. Get some beer for the men. I'll go out to them."

Hardres was mildly surprised to find that the party were dismounting when he reached the door; Dover left his horse and came to him.

"You give us a happy surprise, Lord Dover."

"I am here with a duty, Sir Valentine. I hate to come thus to the house of a friend. It has to be."

"A duty?"

"I fear I'll surprise you. You have been a soldier; you'll bear with my errand?"

He searched Hardres's face, but found nothing there but a bewilderment growing into dignity.

"Strange words, my lord. I'll thank you to be blunt."

"I am a servant of the King. Two enemies of His Majesty who have been in communication with the Dutch are concealed in Woodnesborough Hall. One man is guilty otherwise—the list is long. I come to take these men."

If there had been a suspicion in Dover's mind it disappeared at the sight of the baronet's amazement, the angry flush which rose to his face.

"Harboured here—two men! What mad talk is this?"

"It is my duty but it will also be for your convenience that I remove them."

"My lord, I needs must discharge you from intention to insult me. Whence is this delusion? I have no fugitives nor any strangers within my walls."

"I bring you knowledge. Harry Godwyn and Richard Bolney took refuge in Woodnesborough Hall yesterday."

"Godwyn——"

"I'll take leave to say a host as unwilling as unwitting. This is no made-up story, Sir Valentine. You shall soon have proof."

"Godwyn—my house! Who brought him here? Where is he? This is fantastical."

Dover returned to the waiting group.

"Bunting, you and the sergeant to remain to see no one gets away from the front. Gordon, go to the back; a path leads through the orchard to the Eastry road. Palmer and Rogers come with me. Sir Valentine, I must go through the house."

Edith Hardres, with surprise and question on her face, had come to the door while he was speaking.

"What is this, father? Does Lord Dover——?"

"I beg of Mistress Hardres a thousand pardons but I must enter without delay."

"Lord Dover seeks Mr. Godwyn and his friend, says they are hidden in the house, Edith," said Hardres.

"Mr. Godwyn! Here!"

"He insists on a search, a duty, nothing more. You'll take him round?"

"I'll do nothing like it," she cried with spirit. "An affront, a designed one. You'll permit it, father?"

"He has no choice," said Dover, beckoning to his men.

"No choice indeed. Who's master here? Father ——"

"Come," said Dover brushing past Hardres as the girl retreated before him into the vestibule.

"They can't come in, father. Stop them; why don't you stop them?"

Her voice was high in her resentment and agitation.

"Calm yourself, Edith. Some stupid rumour. I know not how Lord Dover should believe it. Why should I stop him searching?"

"Shall we go above, my lord?" said one of the soldiers from the foot of the staircase.

"The cellar and the kitchen first," said Dover.

"Not there." Edith flew after him and seized him by the arm. "Call them back."

Dover forced her to the settle, and gently enough unbent her finger from his arm. He darted along to his men who had reached the kitchen at the end of the passage and could be heard in colloquy with Mrs. Barton.

Edith drooped limply on the settle.

"They are here?" said Hardres.

"I hid them in the cellar yesterday."

"Girl, what have you done. You——"

She was on her feet again, all flaming.

"Father, listen. Can you hear aught? The hatchway! They may get out in time."

From below stairs came muffled shouts, the sounds of a struggle; then all became quiet.

"They have them," said Hardres.

"Where's your pistol, father?"

"In the drawer—but what's your intent?" He caught her by the wrist as she made to flee from him. "You'll do no good—it's ruin, Edith."

He kept his hold on her while she entreated and tried to wrestle loose.

"Quiet; here they come."

Harry Godwyn was not struggling; he walked between the two soldiers who each held him by the sleeve. His coat was torn at the neck, a smear of blood was on his forehead from a scratch. Behind came Dover, sword in hand.

"My search was justified, Sir Valentine."

"I wish it known that Sir Valentine Hardres was ignorant of my presence in his house," said Harry Godwyn.

"That's true," said Hardres. "What of the other man?"

"Bolney went through the hatchway. We were in time to hold back Godwyn who was following."

Dover walked to the door.

"Sergeant, round to the back and see if Gordon has secured Bolney."

He returned to the hall where Hardres was trying to comfort Edith who had her face buried in his breast.

"I must trouble you for the loan of a horse for my prisoner, Sir Valentine."

"You know the stables, for you've been my guest. Let me say, Lord Dover——"

The sergeant thrust his head in at the door.

"Gordon lies senseless in the orchard, my lord, and the fellow is along the Dover road on a dapple grey."

"After him," thundered Dover. "Take Palmer with you."

Dover looked towards Edith. "You prepared well, Mistress Hardres."

She drew herself away from her father.

"I brought them here, Lord Dover. Make the best of it. I kept the dapple saddled for Mr. Bolney, my father's chestnut for Mr. Godwyn. You may take me too."

"I'm here to do you no harm, Mistress Hardres. You have been misguided—you'll hear no more of it."

At his signal the soldiers led Harry Godwyn out through the door.

"You've got him then," exclaimed Bunting with a grin.

"Go to the stables and bring round the chestnut; he's ready saddled."

Hardres with Edith had followed out, and as Bunting disappeared the baronet challenged Dover.

"What do you do with Mr. Godwyn? The King is granting pardons. Do you take him to London?"

"To Canterbury not to London."

"I trust he'll have fair trial. I should have thought that London——"

" It may be that Godwyn will have no need to make the journey to London."

" What do you mean? " cried Edith. " You cannot mean——"

Bunting came round the corner patting the neck of the chestnut.

" Bring him over," said Dover. " Godwyn, I'm not tying you either hand or foot. I'll not take trouble for it. I ride behind you with my pistol, and the first move you make to escape I shoot. We shan't be harassed with you further."

" The Lord Dover will at last find it easy to kill me," said Harry Godwyn.

" Mount your horse."

" I have something to say."

Edith Hardres made a step out to confront Dover and he looked at the trembling excited girl half-frowning.

" You'll be brief, I beg."

" When you were here a week ago you made me an offer, a suggestion. Are you of the same mind now as then, my lord? If so, I accept the bargain."

He shook his head slowly.

" You mean you don't wish it? "

" Too late, Mistress Hardres. Your refusal then was so well-based that I saw the uselessness of what I asked. I appreciate the honour but 'twould be an empty one for me."

" You won't spare him? "

" Into the saddle, Godwyn," said Dover gathering the reins of his own horse.

Bunting led up the chestnut stallion, a glossy creature inclined to prance and toss his head at the company of strangers around.

"Steady, lad," said Bunting as the chestnut tried to nip his shoulder.

The soldiers were making ready to mount, and Dover was sparing a glance to untwist a stirrup leather, and Harry Godwyn took that moment to make his effort. His hands shot up for a grip on the front of the saddle and he vaulted from the ground straight on to the stallion's back and stuck in his heels as the animal plunged and reared. Bunting went on his haunches and in the scattering surprise Harry Godwyn was clear from the group, madly galloping towards the road.

Dover ran forward to level the pistol he carried in his hand. Edith was on him before he could fire.

"No, no," she cried clutching him, and thrusting herself in front. He tried to throw her aside, and his bullet sped away into the branches of a tree. He jerked himself free and was on his horse as quickly as Harry had been. The two soldiers were already on the move spurring hard.

The chestnut had a lead of many yards and was going like the wind under Harry's fierce urging; halfway to the road he got his feet into the stirrups, and it was then for one palpitating second he foresaw disaster. The gate was closed to the road, five feet of oak, cross-barred, securely latched to the post. One chance only. Had Buccaneer the courage for it? As he steadied the chestnut's pace ten yards from the obstacle, the soldiers behind gave an exulting shout.

"Now, boy!" said Harry with caressing hand on withers. The stallion was ready; no flinching in him. He gathered himself for the spring, then up and over with an inch to spare, as brave a jump as ever his gallant heart attempted. Harry turned him in the direction of Sandwich.

Dover might have made the same venture as Harry Godwyn but was checked by the two men in front of him who pulled their horses.

"Dottles! who shut the gate?"

"You told us to, my lord, when we came in."

"Open it, open it. Don't stand there chattering."

Edith and her father went at a run down to the road; the pursuers were gone from sight though their galloping hoofs could be heard.

"They'll never catch the chestnut," said Hardres.

"They're four to one, father."

As they turned to enter the gateway they saw Tom Godwyn walking towards them from the direction of the church, leading his horse. Edith made her way into the shelter of the garden, but Hardres stood and waited for the young man who came on, glooming and heavy-eyed.

"He got away?"

Hardres looked at him fiercely.

"A brother's blood!"

"What's it to you?"

"I have known wicked men, all kinds of hateful men, but I have never met so vile a creature as you, Tom Godwyn."

"What's he done to me? Who are you to say a word? And you began it——"

"You'll be cursed by this morning's work till you draw your dying breath."

"You mind your own affairs," said Tom Godwyn savagely.

He swung himself to his horse and rode off after the others in the direction of Sandwich.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

UNDER WHICH KING?

COLONEL TOOKE, lieutenant-governor at Dover Castle, a soldier with a scarred bony face, combined hard discipline with an aversion from gossip and a love of reading, and was a puzzle to those who conceived an efficient commander as having perforce some of the attributes of a roaring lion. No doubt of Colonel Tooke's efficiency; he had been left for a year in full charge as deputy after the removal of the Earl of Winchelsea, the Lord Warden. The men in the garrison knew him as merciless to delinquencies, the more to be feared that he spoke in under-tones; he took no wine, was never known to use an oath, and the only sign of irritation he ever gave was when the carrier's cart with letters and news-sheets from London was delayed. A scrupulous governor, self-contained, and much demanding. Who to know the secret thoughts of one who at last has his foot on the ladder, a soldier with no family at his back, with no money besides his pay. Colonel Tooke had his ambitions.

Tooke was in the room which served him for an office reading through a month-old letter from Bishop Burnet in Holland, which had come down from London, a letter pregnant with facts and containing but few religious reflections to temper a wealth of military detail, when the officer of the guard came in to him with the announcement of a visitor.

"He calls himself Richard Bolney, says he was not long since attached to the court in London, has tidings of the gravest. His horse is in a lather."

"Bolney? I know him not."

"Should I take his mission, Governor?"

"What way did he ride?"

"The Deal road."

"That's not straight from London."

"He's all heat and arrogance. What he has is for your ears only."

"Bring him to me. Give him respect."

Bolney, moist and dusty, in a fever with his errand, was yet regardful of approach to one who meant so much; his bow to the governor had a leisurely dignity.

"The cousin of Sir Thaddeus Bolney—you'll recall the baronet—thanks you for your kind quickness in thus receiving him. Urgency drives manners to the devil, governor. I was supping with Mr. Pepys in Whitehall but recently——"

"You may cease this. You are Richard Bolney, sometime a scrivener at the Green Cloth, thrown out for a wagging tongue. Let me have no rubbish. What's your purpose here?"

Bolney met his eye squarely.

"And you, Colonel Tooke, are one whose name is on the list of those serious men who lead this country —men who know we are at a crisis and seek to guide affairs."

"I am not good at riddles," said Tooke; his voice was less harsh.

"Colonel Tooke is one who may have high rank in the service of his country when the change comes."

"You are speaking that which may put you under a beam. Whence is your information?"

"You know Mr. Cornwallis?"

"I have heard the name."

"I am of his household. I may call myself one of his lieutenants. He has great power in all that is afoot."

"You a Cornwallis man, eh? A dangerous allegiance."

"You should know," said Bolney.

Tooke studied him with gravity.

"Let's have the heart of it," he said at length.

"Cornwallis, one of the Prince's six best men, is in Holland. His adopted son and his heir, a young man in Kent named Harry Godwyn, has been seized by Lord Dover and is like to be murdered before the day is out."

"Murder is a strong word. Dover is vicious, no fool, though."

With an ardour and a temper unusual in him Bolney poured forth the story in something like three minutes. "Cornwallis is bound up in Harry Godwyn. Cornwallis will be by the new King's side."

"It seems a case of injustice. There are many such. Dover no doubt has legal warrant."

"Injustice!" cried Bolney, "Is that your word?"

"I do not see where I stand in this affair. You speak of Cornwallis—an exile, surely? King James's flag floats above this castle."

"I have not told you all, I have not shown you all, Colonel Tooke. On the road from Deal I saw that which you should see."

The light in his eyes, the clamour of his voice, conveyed some message which went beyond his words.

"What is it?" asked Tooke, rising from his chair, and even as he spoke a suspicion of the truth went through him.

"A sight you'll remember all your life. Can we reach the top of the keep?"

"You'll not tell me——"

"We'd best go up," said Bolney.

They came out on to a flat roof, giving on one side to miles of farmland and woodland and on the other to the open sea with the dim cliffs of France in the distance. Bolney led the governor to an embrasure with a view in a south-easterly direction.

"There's my argument, Colonel Tooke."

The governor with his hand on a corner of the masonry, looked out on the spectacle at which Bolney was pointing his finger. A great fleet was coming up the Channel. From the top of the keep they seemed so numerous that in their spread they covered half the sea between England and France, men-of-war, fly-boats, fireships, hundreds of vessels all under sail making their way westwards.

"The Prince!"

"The fleet comes to save England," said Bolney. "The sailors on board are mostly English, the noblemen who lead it are English. The Prince brings 10,000 foot and 3,000 horse; he is the greatest soldier in Europe."

Colonel Tooke gazed steadily at the armada; his face was expressionless but his brain was busy. He turned his look landwards.

"The beacons have been lighted," he said; "I see their smoke."

"King James will need more than beacons."

"Let us go down."

They slowly descended the murky stairs, and Colonel Tooke had made a decision by the time they reached the hall below.

"They take Godwyn to Canterbury?"

"He will probably break for Sandwich if he can."

"Fetch Captain Lunt," said Tooke to the sentry, who was pacing the hall. "How much time have we, Bolney?"

"I came the short road through Eastry—they haven't started more than half an hour I'd say."

He stopped speaking as the young officer came in.

"You wished for me, Governor?"

"Boot and saddle. Twelve men. Carbines."

"And give me a fresh horse," said Bolney. "I've finished my brave dapple for to-day."

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE FIGHT ON THE DEAL ROAD

HARRY GODWYN'S heart was warm with hope at the feel of the horse beneath him—the conquering ease, the effortless strength and pace, withal the spurning fiery temper with its hoard of stamina. Buccaneer should give him view of Dover Castle in an hour, and those who followed no nearer then than now.

Hedges and trees streamed by as the stallion settled to his work, glad to show his mettle, half angry, half contemptuous at those who deemed that they could overtake him, and within sight followed Dover and his men thundering at full stretch making good speed, notwithstanding soldierly equipment.

At easy stride Harry leaped to a field of clover ley, and then set a pace for the hop-garden ahead where the poles had been gathered and he would have fair passage. Faintly he heard a shout, and the thud of hoofs behind him, and he wasted no moment to turn his head, but drove on hard, desperate indeed, confident except for the chance of accident, thanking Heaven for his steed.

Startled rabbits scurried into safety from the track and had just time to do it, and the only living things that out-distanced pursuers and pursued were the sea-gulls, curvetting and crying overhead, airy, swirling spectators of a race for life or death. Harry Godwyn knew full well that doom was at his heels till he should see the outline of Dover Castle rise ahead of him.

On the highway to Deal drivers of farm carts drew in to the grassy fringe to give way to the solitary horseman riding as for a wager, and the four who came after, armed men all, plainly bent on capture of the hatless fugitive. Carrier Harlow stood wide-straddled to look after the disappearing riders, and climbed to his seat again with a rare tale to tell when he arrived at Sandwich.

Through the long street of Deal the pace was slackened perforce by the many people on foot and an occasional cart which kept the middle of the way. Dover urged on impetuously in hope of the obstructions to be met in the town, but fortune was with Harry—though he had to jump clean over a barrow with turnips in it left outside " The Merry Whistler " inn by a thirsty gardener. Shopkeepers hurried to their doors, women put down their marketing baskets, and boys shouted their huzzas. The chase drove through the gaping town with Dover but three hundred yards behind his quarry.

It was at the cross-roads beyond Walmer that Harry had reason for concern that to save his horse for a last effort he had allowed his enemies to narrow the gap. From the lane to the north came a waggon laden with sacks of wheat, and he had to check the stallion while it passed. The pause brought his enemies dangerously near; he could hear the snorting of the horses, the rattle of bit and chain, the rub and rustle of accoutrements.

The gentle declivity beyond the cross-roads aided the stallion's fresh burst, but it gave help also to those who followed, and at the beginning of the rise beyond the dip Harry possessed but fifty yards of lead. He had no dismay. They might still gain a little but when they breasted the hill Buccaneer's quality would tell, and once

at the top he would certainly show diminishing hoofs to a tired pack.

But Dover and his men did not mount the hill; they came to an abrupt halt in the hollow and Harry, hearing a loud ejaculation or command, turned to see that which caused him to drop an oath for his want of forethought.

Bunting had a pistol levelled. Crack! There was a thud in the road where the bullet fell. The two soldiers had dismounted and were preparing their carbines, and Harry in a ferment plunged his heels violently against the stallion's sides. The first bullet sang by him on the right. If he could but reach the brow—and he had no time for further thought, for Buccaneer gave a coughing grunt, staggered a yard or so and then sank back on his haunches with a bullet through his off-side hind leg. Harry pulled himself free from the stirrups as the stallion dropped, to observe the men coming up the hill on foot; Bunting and the two troopers had followed the example of Dover and unsheathed their swords.

He cast around for a place to make a stand and went at a run across the rising turf on his left to a grassy mound, a gun-shot from the road. It was well designed for one who meant to take his price, falling away steeply on each side; moreover, the back of the mound had been cut sheer in an excavation for chalk. Two might come at him up the slope from the front, no more. Harry wished there had been but space for one.

"Godwyn, yield you. We are in force."

Harry said no word; his sword hung loosely from his wrist, its point tapping the toe of his boot.

In this breathing spell with the sentence of death on him Harry observed on the hill opposite a windmill with its sweeps slowly revolving, and beneath it a brown

field in which a man with two horses was harrowing in winter wheat. He wondered what Tomlyn would do about the autumn sowing when he heard the news.

"Now, Godwyn."

Harry took in the fact that Dover had one of the soldiers by him, and that the others were to right and left, ready for a scramble up the sides of the little plateau. He had but one hope.

"You have a reputation, Lord Dover. There is something not sufficiently known—you are a coward."

"Do you yield?"

"A conqueror of women, but when it comes to men, Lord Dover has to pay money for assistance; too much danger in it."

Dover ran forward the few steps necessary for him to engage, and there was a glitter and flash of steel. The soldier approached a yard. Regardless of his unfavourable position on the slightly lower ground, Dover pressed hotly on an opponent as lustful as himself to make an end of the matter. No eye could follow the first glittering whirlwind of thrust and parry, and then Dover went back a step with a spot of blood showing on his neck—suddenly made conscious of danger as well as difficulty.

The soldier came on with him now full of bulldog zest and, not so wary as his leader, he pushed a little in front. Harry saw his opportunity and, with a sudden energy against one who had a heavy sword and no niceties of play, had scored a point. The soldier collapsed with a thrust beneath the armpit which two inches lower would have meant his death.

Harry had to leap back to escape Dover, and then was called on for every quickness he had learned in by-gone years. The higher ground served him well. Dover, in

a blaze of attack, touched Harry more than once but could reach no vital part. Bunting came up the slope to join his leader.

"Go in, he's finished," said Dover, and with heaving breast stepped back. Harry, however, was too good for Bunting and within a minute the adventurer slid down the slope howling with pain at a three inch thrust through the muscle of his arm. Dover advanced with his remaining soldier.

Harry was still at bay, bleeding from face and neck and arm, fighting on as in a mist when there came an interruption which gave temporary check to the ardour of his assailants. A galloping horse had been brought to a standstill in the road beneath, and the rider had jumped from his saddle and was running up the slope shouting as he came; his sword was in his hand, Dover flashed a glance backwards, and the soldier, retreating to safety, turned with a stare. The newcomer was Tom Godwyn, his face alight with malignant eagerness.

Fortunate for Harry Godwyn in the enfeeblement that came upon him that Dover now was concerned to do little more than defend himself; this reinforcement would quickly put a finish to the affair. As for Harry, it was his subconscious self that with the remnants of his strength made a pass, pretended at a thrust, withdrew a foot as though in lure. His brother Tom! A fitting end! Harry Godwyn tried to fight on: his brother—any one of them—should kill him standing.

Half a dozen yards from the staring soldier Tom Godwyn roared out his words.

"Hold 'em, Harry."

Dover pivoted swiftly at what might have been a discharge of cannon from behind him. The soldier apprised by Tom Godwyn's demeanour was braced for

defence. Harry, with swimming brain, pushed his sword point into the turf to steady himself.

Tom Godwyn charged on the pair in front of him like a mad bull. No faltering for one who had led the breaching party at Barmstadt, and so terrific was his onslaught that Dover and the soldier, with the benefit of the rising ground now theirs, had hard work to hold him back between them. Suddenly leaping to the left Tom Godwyn had the soldier alone, and, before Dover could rush in, the man was down with a deep thrust through his breast.

The swords of Dover and Tom Godwyn were clashing, the younger man lithe, fierce-eyed, striving to edge himself higher on the slope, the other, full of craft, scheming for an opening, when Harry limp and weak saw beyond them, down in the road, a dozen horsemen.

Was that Bolney getting hurriedly from the saddle? Who was the tall man behind him? Soldiers too! Harry saw but through a blur, as the party came running up the hill; his knees gave way beneath him. He was unconscious a minute or so, and came to himself to find his head and shoulders supported by Bolney.

"All's well, Harry!"

Half way down the hill Dover and Tooke stood in angry talk, Dover wiping his sword with a handful of grass. Some of the words could be heard.

"His Majesty has put a traitor to command his castle at Dover."

"And an assassin to command his guard. Your horse awaits you in the road."

"I'll carry the news——"

"He'll have worse before you reach him. Bloodhound, I've a mind to have you roped."

"You'll hear of this." Dover sheathed his sword

and with a glance around at Tooke's soldiers tending the fallen men walked slowly to the road.

"Tom—what's happened to Tom?" said Harry; he managed to stagger up with Bolney's arm around him.

"Tom met mishap," said Bolney gravely, "he lunged to Dover's shoulder. The grass was slippery and his left foot lost its hold as he came back. Dover ran him through. He's there. I'll take you to him."

Harry dropped to his knees beside his prostrate brother.

"Tom, Tom, lad."

Tom Godwyn opened his half-closed eyes; a shadow of a smile was in them.

"We stung 'em, Harry," he said in a whisper.

"Tom, you're not badly hurt—you'll be all right."

Tom Godwyn moved his head an inch sideways; a trickle of blood came from his mouth.

"Tom," cried Harry Godwyn in agony.

Tom Godwyn did not move again.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

VISITS OF IMPORTANCE

SIR VALENTINE HARDRES was punctilious in spirit and in letter, and having satisfied himself that he should go to Brook House, he put on his Sunday coat with its pink braidings, his periwig too, and his new wide-brimmed hat. Wacher was commanded to change from his kitchen dress and attend his master on the dapple.

"Take my gold-headed cane; you can carry it across your saddle-bow," said Sir Valentine.

If circumstances beyond the ordinary made it necessary that he should ride to Brook House, for years the source of irritation and offence to him, it was the more important that he should pay his first visit with proper form and dignity.

He carried correctitude to the point of alighting at the avenue gate and leaving the horses in charge of Wacher; and then, gold cane in hand, he walked with measured step up towards the house. His eye took in the magnitude of the age-long oaks, the sweep of the well-kept grass, the extent of the outbuildings with fresh thatch on the barns, the sleek cows in the yard with ribs well-covered—no tumbledown domain despite its poverty.

Tomlyn came to the door and in his surprise almost forgot his manners.

"Why, if it ain't—'tis you, Sir Valentine."

"Good morning, Tomlyn. I have called to inquire the condition of the squire."

"Squire's building up. Will ye not come in, sir?"

"It is unnecessary. I hear your master is out of danger."

"Never much danger, so Surgeon Dunkin says. He was sapped of a lot of blood and terrible upset about his brother. Kept on moaning and blaming himself."

"He's still abed?"

"Aye, and with the blinds down. He's getting better, though, but Surgeon Dunkin says he's to sleep as much as he can, and nobody to see him."

"When he is able to receive a message, you will convey to him my inquiries. You will also express my desire for an early and complete recovery."

"He's worried you'd not forgive him."

"Forgive him?"

"You'd never believe it—when he stopped crying out about his brother, it was the stallion; he'd killed the stallion."

"Damme, Tomlyn, thought of the horse, did he? Buccaneer is home again; he can stand and hobble about a little."

"Squire'll be rare glad. Have ye tried the dock and dandelion salve?"

"We washed the place and bandaged it up. We feared at first a tendon was gone."

"Dock and dandelion salve, that's the thing, and hot foments above and below the wound. We had a colt once—but you'll not wish to hear about that."

"I'll speak to Barton of this salve."

"Oh, aye, Barton," said Tomlyn doubtfully.

"You've kept good order here in the absence of the

squire," said Hardres, turning to look at the rickyard, as he made ready to leave.

"Short of men, but we've managed somehow. Hear those pigs, sir?"

"You've good sows, I'm told."

"Those pigs you can hear—the finest ten-weeks porkers this side of Canterbury. Would you like to see 'em?"

They walked together to the sty where a raucous, squirming, roly-poly group were struggling together to get a big share of the wash which Jarvis was emptying from two buckets into the trough.

"Ten weeks, Tomlyn?"

"Born ten weeks last Sunday, the twelve of 'em."

"They're our southern breed, I see—the secret's in those good sows of yours."

Tomlyn lifted a finger sagely.

"There's some believe pigs'll eat anything. Give 'em the best, I say, it's cheapest."

"We feed ours with good barley meal and middlings."

"Give 'em sharps, too, after eight weeks old. Besides that, use no water; middlings, barley-meal, sharps, mix it all with skimmed milk."

"Takes a lot of good skimmed milk."

"We get it back in meat."

As they turned from the pigstyes towards the farmyard and the avenue, Tomlyn said:

"A long walk to Woodnesborough, would you like me to saddle a horse, Sir Valentine? The squire would wish it."

"I thank you, Tomlyn, but I have a man with my horse at the gate."

"Barton?"

"No, not Barton."

"Barton ought to have thought of that dock and dandelion salve, Sir Valentine."

Bolney, who had constituted himself an additional guardian at Brook House while Harry lay prostrate, was displeased that, owing to a ride to Canterbury for letters from Mr. Cornwallis, he had failed to be present when Sir Valentine made his call.

"I have no doubt you did the honours correctly, Tomlyn, according to your lights, but a gentleman like Sir Valentine should be received by one of mark. He would expect it. Did he ask for me?"

"Never said a word about you, Mr. Bolney. He asked about the squire."

"He must have imagined I was back in London. I have a desire to meet Sir Valentine. With all his faults a person of quality, one moreover beneath whose roof I stole some shelter. You could know but little of the feelings of a man of family, Tomlyn?"

"My father held a farm at Staple under the squire's grandfather—good enough for me, Mr. Bolney."

"A worthy retrospect, if somewhat limited. No disrespect is intended, Tomlyn. We are all as we are born."

"I'm one as thinks 'tis more useful to learn to use a bill-hook than a sword."

"You show your lowly origin, Tomlyn, and I travel beyond you. Tell me now—you know Sir Valentine—would it be fitting that I should make a call on him at Woodnesborough Hall?"

"Better wait till the master is well again, Mr. Bolney."

"There's Mistress Hardres—I owe her my respects."

"Aye, there's Mistress Hardres."

"She has not honoured us with a visit."

"Women are queer."

"The squire thinks much of her; I hope he'll have good fortune."

"Why should he not?" Tomlyn was almost defiant. "You told me you saw her in Sandwich yesterday talking and laughing with young Oxenden."

"Remember how she came to the squire's help, fought for him right through. Laughing with young Oxenden, well she's young too."

"I'd not have another blow fall on the squire, Tomlyn. Mistress Hardres has been filled with gratitude and remorse, too. Also, she wanted to make up for her father. You can't tell. She's paid her debt."

"Paid her debt! She could never do that," grunted the ungallant Tomlyn.

"I'd not be positive about any woman, Tomlyn, and 'tis a throw of the dice she'd marry him out of gratitude."

"Would he have that! You don't know the master."

"I'm puzzling if I know Mistress Hardres," said Bolney.

Bolney's reflection on women had extended scope before the day was out, for Brook House had no less a visitor than Lady Oxenden, now as always angular to look at, but with a graciousness beyond her wont, on an errand which mingled courtesy, duty and inquisitiveness in equal parts. Sir James had written to her from London that in the midst of a hundred excitements appertaining to the Prince's progress towards town, many in high quarters were talking of young Squire Godwyn's battle with Lord Dover. The squire had powerful friends in London, it would seem. Rumours were adrift about a fortune that was to come to him. Were the squire's hurts improving? Sir James reminded his wife

that he had always held friendship with the old squire despite the decline of fortune at Brook House.

"What's she a-coming here for?" said Tomlyn, as he saw the Oxenden coach with its four bays and two footmen moving up the avenue at a stately pace. "Not so fond of us this ten years past."

"You may leave Lady Oxenden to me," said Bolney. "The Oxendens, I understand, are a family of repute."

"You'll taste her vinegar," said Tomlyn.

Bolney was at his grandest and his best as he escorted her ladyship from the coach into the house, bestowed a dignified acceptance on her sympathy, assured her, as the squire's closest—if not quite his oldest—friend, that the knowledge of her visit would be an ingredient towards his recovery.

"Your family holds a high place in his esteem, my lady."

"He must come and see us when he's better. He has not been to the house since a boy. He and Christopher were much together. He has been very sensitive and retiring. This Mr. Cornwallis adopts him?"

"It comes very near to it. I have not been honoured by Mr. Cornwallis's own words on the affair."

"I shall never forgive Sir Valentine Hardres for dragging Mr. Godwyn through all this trouble."

"The squire bears no grudge, your ladyship."

"I'll say this for Edith Hardres—though she's pert beyond her years—she knows the squire took disgrace and perilled his life for the two of them."

"Mistress Hardres has respect for the squire," said Bolney cautiously.

"She's not all froth, though she often seems so. I hope the squire will have some sense."

"I fear I do not take your ladyship's meaning."

"This, Mr. Bolney: the squire's too good a man for Edith Hardres."

"I trust you will not distress the squire——"

"Ooms! Mr. Bolney, he'll know it soon or late. Let him not flatter himself the lively limb's in love. He should come to it before he marries her."

"Why then should she marry him?"

"By Heaven, how can she help it after all he's done."

"You're beyond my depths, your ladyship."

"My son Chris—he's off his food about the girl. These young fools! You are unmarried, I hear."

"Nature denied me the necessary gifts."

"Endowed you with prudence is what you mean. Speak no court language to me, Mr. Bolney."

One morning a fortnight later Harry Godwyn, his clothes hanging looser than of old, the heavy tan departed from his face, took a stout ground ash in his hand and went forth on his first considerable excursion out of doors. He found the walk to Woodnesborough longer than it used to be, and was surprised at himself, as is the way with those more than usually strong who have been laid low for a time. He was at low ebb when he passed through the gateway where Buccaneer had made his saving leap and his heart was thumping loud enough for him to hear it.

"I take this as kindly of you, Mr. Godwyn," said Hardres, formality lightened by his tone. "You are but recently afoot. Will you not enter?"

He went before his visitor into the library and placed a chair for him.

"If it is not too late, Sir Valentine, I come to bring you my apologies for all that occurred here. Perhaps you will give me leave to explain——"

"All the explaining is done, Mr. Godwyn, and I will

hear no more. I have an impulsive, generous daughter."

"Yes," said Harry.

Hardres rang for Mrs. Barton.

"Bring in a bottle of cherry cordial and two glasses."

With uplifted hand he forbade a further word till Mrs. Barton had returned, and Harry had partaken of a drink which could not fail to warm and cheer.

"The hurt to the stallion? Does he improve, Sir Valentine?"

"I've an idea 'twas not his tendon after all. He has a limp, but 'tis going off."

"A great horse!"

"And the temper of a lamb, there's the marvel of it."

"Perhaps I might see him before I go?"

"I swear he'll know you."

"I'm hoping he'll forgive me," said Harry with his first smile. "Sir Valentine, I wish to speak of one or two other matters if you will give me patience."

"Drink that second glass of cordial and you may proceed, not before."

"The strip of arable beyond Marshborough—father had it fenced in when the lawyers gave it to him."

"In all amiability, Mr. Godwyn, I shall still persist the land is mine and always was. I'll make no quarrel on it to-day."

"This morning I had the man out there taking down the fence. Your land now goes back to the gorse. There are some oats sown—I suppose that won't matter?"

"Eh! You've pulled down the fence? Why in the name of Heaven? I should have been consulted, Mr. Godwyn."

"They've taken away all the posts and rails. Belike you were right about it."

"Handy—dandy! Without a word. I would not have wished it. I have plenty of land. Besides——"

"I am putting up a new gate at Twisted Corner where the cows sometimes break through into your pasture."

"The cows haven't been through for months."

"They may relapse any time. About the rabbits in Single Acre plantation—they're as much nuisance to my crops as to yours."

"I haven't said a word about them this year."

"With dogs, guns and spades we can clear the place in a couple of days."

Hardres poured out some more cordial for himself.

"I will go so far as to say this, Mr. Godwyn, I have sometimes been impatient with you and yours."

"We could hold our own in that," said Harry.

Sir Valentine lighted a pipe, and made Harry light one too, and they sat for a minute, each in knowledge of what had been left unsaid. Hardres was the first to speak.

"A sad and dreadful affair, Mr. Godwyn. I have not been happy about some words I spoke to your brother. It was outside the gate here before he got on his horse to follow you."

"Of what concern now?"

"I belaboured him. I told him he was out to slay you. He never contradicted me."

"Tom had his pride."

"I've deep regret for what I said to him."

Harry Godwyn raised his head wearily.

"My harshness to my brother drove him to what he was."

Hardres spoke out.

"I'll take leave to call that nonsense, Mr. Godwyn. About your brother I know more than you suppose I

do, about you too. You'll have another glass of cordial; you're pale with this long tramp of yours from Ash."

"He shamed me at the last," said Harry.

"No, Mr. Godwyn, you may be comforted. He did what in him lay; he made amends."

"Aye, he made amends. Most will call him wicked still."

"None in my hearing shall cast a stone."

Hardres raised his glass.

"I drink to the memory of a brave man—a Godwyn."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

SIR VALENTINE SURVIVES A SHOCK

THEY went out from the library to meet Edith Hardres in the vestibule, where confessedly she had been waiting for them, eager of face and voice, and dancing on the oak flooring to keep her feet warm, so she said.

"Edith, Mr. Godwyn has been good enough to visit us; I do not know that he should have put this on himself so soon."

"You are not yet recovered, Mr. Godwyn."

She put out her hand, and studied him.

"Cramped with being prisoned at home so long. Nothing more. I'm already better for the walk this morning."

He sought to steel himself against her solicitude, to encourage no delusion.

She ran and fetched a stool for him, one for her father also, and Harry saw whimsical little crows' feet at her eyes, and curls that would not keep still in her excitement, and the happy twinkle he knew so well, albeit some touch of shyness.

They talked of the horses, of Buccaneer and his injury, of how the dapple was a wonder for her size, and Harry hardly knew the replies he made, and wondered if 'twas imagination that Edith kept her eyes so fixed on him as she stood with her hand on her father's shoulder.

"Perhaps, Mr. Godwyn will do us the pleasure of taking dinner with us," said Hardres.

"I'm under orders from Deborah, Sir Valentine. She's stern about dinner. I'm commanded for twelve o'clock."

"You'll see the horses?" said Edith.

"And the store pigs. I'm feeding them on skimmed milk now—Tomlyn's instruction."

They rose to go out and beyond the porch they found Barton in waiting with a barrow load of young fruit trees.

"You said you'd come and show me where you wanted 'em put in, Sir Valentine."

"South side by the wall; I forgot you, Barton."

"Shall we all go?" said Edith.

"You take Mr. Godwyn to the stables. I'll join you when I've started Barton."

"Would he put them in upside down without you?"

"I wouldn't trust him. Barton, you don't look yourself this morning."

"Oh ah!" said Barton.

Harry patted Buccaneer's neck, and Edith found a morsel of cake for the dapple and then they strolled out to the back of the house where the old orchard was. A missel thrush encouraged by December mildness was piping the coming spring.

They walked slowly to and fro while he answered many questions, and sought awkwardly for an opportunity.

"You will be friends with father henceforth, Mr. Godwyn?"

"I hope so. With you too?"

"Yes," she said.

"Mistress Hardres, I have to be bold to tell you some-

thing, and I do not know what is going to happen to me when I have told it."

They stopped in their walk and she looked at him, the light fading from her face.

"I came here for this, and I have had cowardice in me all the time, all the while I have been talking with you and your father."

"We owe you very much, Mr. Godwyn."

"Mistress Hardres, why do you think I feigned drunk at the Mayor's house back in the summer? You will not be deceived; it was from no affection for your father."

"You would not wish to see my father suffer injustice. You knew he had done nothing wrong."

"I was not chivalrous. I acted for myself—because of my own feelings."

"You will always be welcome here for what you did —whatever the cause."

"No call for gratitude," said Harry with unsteady voice. He let his stick fall to the ground and stood upright without it. "I had my fears. No, you will not hurt me, Mistress Hardres. Truth is best to-day."

"Shall we go in?"

She was trembling, anxious; gentle, too.

"Let me say my say."

She did not answer him.

"As a young girl, I saw in you a loveliness which was unreal. I did not love you then. You were from another world. Many a day I have gone home tired from work and all aglow at some sight of you along the road or at Sandwich. A boy and his folly! You slipped up into womanhood, although so young and, God help me, you became all I thought of. Sometimes I dreamt that my father might become reconciled to Sir Valentine.

How would that bring you nearer me? The struggling farmer—and the daughter of Sir Valentine Hardres! You lighted up my life. If I could tell you what you meant to me! I see the pity in you. Have no pity. You were to me a great possession, though you knew it not. I could never again have such a day of happiness as when we met for the blackberrying at Richborough. I will not wring your sympathy. I was mad with jealousy at Dover. What right had I? You are embedded in my life always—though you never speak to me again. I did not come for any other purpose to-day but to tell you this."

He stooped to pick up his stick, and when he rose he saw her standing there looking at him with moist eyes.

"My one and only confession, Mistress Hardres," he said with a brave attempt at a smile. "You will not be further troubled."

"I hope I will," she said, gulping a sob.

The sun burst into that clouded December sky and traversed from east to west, the stars came out, and made their methodic movement across the firmament; there was no longer solid earth. He stumbled towards her and she caught him in her strong young arms.

"Harry, Harry," she cried.

A minute went by, and she had no need to cling to him for he had her in a grasp which seemed to make past weakness a pretence, and she made no essay to get free though he was near to crushing the breath from her. He still held her when he spoke.

"Why did you seem so frightened?"

"I was frightened you would not tell me," she said.

He pulled himself up and gazed at her, and her eyes were bright through their wetness at his amazement.

"To think that you——"

"I have often thought of it."

"You! That cannot be. How?—Since when have you thus thought of me?"

"I will tell you from when—I have no shame in it. From about the second time I saw you—or was it the third time?"

They walked, they knew not where they walked, in between the trees and over the grass, and were back near the house when Harry said, "I wonder if there will ever be time while I live to tell you all I want to tell you."

"I have more to say than you."

She looked at him smiling; he took her in his arms.

"What is this?"

Hardres had come round the corner of the house and was rigid at the spectacle. Barton by his side ejaculated grimly, "I guessed what it would be."

Harry Godwyn released Edith, then took her by the hand, and walked over with her to Hardres and made a bow.

"Sir Valentine, I have the honour to ask the hand in marriage of your daughter, Mistress Hardres."

"What the devil! Edith! Out here in the open! Not a word to me beforehand! Mr. Godwyn, you have never lacked in boldness. I'd never have believed that Edith—Barton, don't stand there grunting. Off you go, off with you, quick!"

He scowled at the departing Barton, and then said: "Come indoors both of you." He went ahead and they followed, Edith holding tightly to Harry's hand the while. In the library he faced them.

"Now, Mr. Godwyn."

"I do not know what to say, sir, except that your daughter and I love each other and always have."

"You think that you are a match for her?"

"No man can be that, sir."

"Ye're right there. Edith, what's from you?"

"I am very happy, father. This is a great surprise and——"

"Zooks! Am I more blind than Barton? Are you set on him, Edith?"

"No man can ever come near me, if I do not have Mr. Godwyn."

"Gad, I believe you'd take him spite of me."

"I cannot help it, father."

Hardres stood and looked at the two in silence. He sighed and then he went over to Edith and put his arm round her neck and kissed her as tenderly as any mother could have done.

"My dear, I only wish you to be happy. What else is there for me to think of?"

She hugged him tightly, and her speech was half smothered. "No, no, father, not against your will, not that."

Hardres patted her, "I'll have no fear for you." He looked over her shoulder at Harry Godwyn. "You hear me, Mr. Godwyn, I'll have no fear for her."

"You speak a noble word, sir," said Harry.

"I have common sense," said Hardres.

"It is right that I should tell you, Sir Valentine, that your daughter will not come to a penniless man. Mr. Cornwallis has written to me; I am his heir. And he intends during his lifetime——"

"You make your first displeasing utterance to-day, Mr. Godwyn. If my daughter is content with a hard-working squire——"

"I wish it, father."

"I too. Mr. Godwyn, no money can add an inch to

a man for my daughter. Ods pins, I'd rather have you poor and as you are."

"Rich or poor 'twill make no difference, sir."

"Tell me this, you'll not be going up to London with all these great friends of yours, befrilled and spangled, at Whitehall and thereabouts."

"I shall work on my farm always."

"I would have it so."

Sir Valentine paused and mumbled to himself, and Edith read his thoughts.

"Harry will not remember the hard things. You never really thought him bad. He knows that."

"I am an irritable man. His father and I abused each other. I suppose I've abused him too. You have a strong temper, Mr. Godwyn. Nay, don't stop me, girl. He's got his faults. But I'll tell you what I think of him. I never had a son. I would thank Heaven on my bended knees if I had such a son as he."

The arrogant old chin quivered for a moment. Harry tried to find a word and could not get it out.

"You'll stay to dinner," said Hardres briskly. "That will give us time to go and look at those store pigs of mine. The skimmed milk is doing wonders. Mr. Godwyn stops to dinner, Edith. What of the kitchen?"

"I am going out with you," said Edith. "I want to hear what he says about the pigs."

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

ON A CHRISTMAS DAY

THE market day before Christmas, always notable for much trading in stock and provender and a talkative good-humour whatever the weather and the prices, had not for years such reason for gossip. The Prince was in London, the King in flight to France—great happenings these, with all their consequences to be marvelled on, yet with many but a background to a more immediate topic. Sandwich had rare feast of news.

"The squire have had his eye on her all along," said Farmer Laslett. "I could have told ye a year ago or more. I was never deceived about it."

"A clever one you be now 'tis known, Laslett," said Host Breming. "Why I've heard you say that Annie Sackett——"

"Annie Sackett—pooh! I but remarked she set a cap at the squire. I see who the squire was after, so would anyone else with eyes in their head."

"Sharper than me. Fair struck me all of a heap—what with Sir Valentine and all."

"Squire is no man to be put down by Sir Valentine; I could have told ye that."

"A maid wants a man and she'll have him," said Lott, the maltster. "She's got a will of her own, bit of a temper too if all I hear is right."

Host Breming showed unaccustomed spirit.

"I don't stick up for the gentry in a manner of

speaking, but Mistress Hardres is as good as gold, and I'll say it to her face if need be."

"And I'll tell ye this," said Laslett, "squire would have had her anyway. Will of her own indeed!"

"I'm saying nought against her," protested the maltster, "other people got eyes besides you, Laslett. She never thought of no one else, that's all I'm asaying. Look at her now. Always over to Brook House when squire's not at the Hall."

"Where else should she be?" demanded Laslett.

"Squire's mazed about her," said Breming. "He's well enough now, and hasn't turned a handstroke of work this fortnight. She goes about with him in the barns and stables and over the fields."

"In Sandwich here with him yesterday, so they say," said the maltster; "he a laughing and carrying on, and she looking up at him as if he was two kings rolled into one."

"Ain't she a right to?" asked Laslett fiercely.

"Christmas Day's the wedding then?" said the maltster.

"There won't be a wedding like it in our day. Sir Valentine have ordered, as soon as the bells at Woodnesborough ring out, every inn in Sandwich is to be free and open for beer and bread and cheese for all who wants it—all day long too."

"Roasting an ox whole at the Hall, they be," said Breming.

"And everyone at the Hall or Brook House to have an extra month's wages."

"I reckon there'll be a lot who've never seen the squire come in from round about and get drunk for nothing," said the maltster.

Laslett surveyed him balefully.

" Ye've a sour heart, Tobias Lott; it's living in Deal, that's what it is."

" He needs a quart of beer," laughed Breming.

" A quart of sheep wash more like."

" Come into the tap-room both of you," said Breming.

At Woodnesborough Hall for a large part of each day a black-haired elderly man from London was in conclave with Sir Valentine Hardres on such subjects as the maintenance of the Protestant religion, the character and prospects of the Prince, the advisability of a yearly visit to London of Sir Valentine, his daughter and the squire, the personal points of the Godwyns, and whether Mr. Cornwallis should buy a summer home in the neighbourhood or spend a month alternatively at Brook House and the Hall.

They came to loggerheads as they were bound to do; Sir Valentine insisted that his dowry to Edith should be ample, more than sufficient to set the squire on his way to breeding the best horses in Kent, Cornwallis was for buying back one of the old Godwyn farms to raise, as in bygone times, large flocks of sheep. It took them an hour to fail to convince each other. Sir Valentine went to the cellar for a bottle of Alicante to ease the discussion, and illumination broke upon them.

" We'll do both," said Sir Valentine.

" Why not? What have we been arguing about? The best horses and the best sheep! "

A cloud came over Sir Valentine's face.

" He's cursed obstinate, Mr. Cornwallis."

The lawyer nodded.

" Always wants his own way."

" Generally gets it."

" Says he won't take a penny of dowry with Edith."

"Nor a penny of money from me."

They drank a glass of wine each, and then Cornwallis said:

"Are two old men to be bullied thus?"

"If you can see a way——"

Cornwallis threw back his head and laughed.

"We'll teach him to be obstinate! I'll mesh him. I'll tie him up with deeds and trusts so he can't move a foot. Not a word till all's completed."

"I always knew there must be some use for lawyers," said Sir Valentine genially.

* * * * * *

The silvery glistening Christmas Day when Harry Godwyn and Edith Hardres were wedded was more memorable to Sandwich, Woodnesborough and Ash than the day when the new King was enthroned in London—which should not be taken as evidence of lukewarmness in the Protestant faith. The excitements were continuous from the morning when willing hands brushed and cleaned and dried the roadway for the hundred yards between Woodnesborough Hall and the church—with straw to cover the melting puddles. An hour later villagers filled the back seats and overflowed into the porch and were part of a congregation and a scene such as the oldest could not recall—what with the Oxendens, the Botelers, a score of other gentlefolk, the mayor and jurats from Sandwich in their robes, and the gentleman from London in a gorgeous new red coat who strutted up and down the aisle, showing people to their places. Mr. Bolney was his name—of noble family, so 'twas said.

There was a thrill when Mistress Hardres came in with her father, very serious and very dainty in that

gown of silk and lace which had been her mother's wedding dress thirty years before. In her hand she carried a bunch of early primroses picked that morning from the sunny side of the coppice. A hush was over the crowded gazers and the faint swish of her gown could be plainly heard. "Purty as a yellow-hammer in spring," said Peter Syme afterwards. Lady Oxenden went further, "The girl has her faults, but I forgot 'em; she looked like a fairy."

And yet not all the time were eyes upon the bride. Up by the chancel rails stood Harry Godwyn slim and erect with a flush on his face. Some admired him because he was handsome and some because he looked such a brave young squire, and none knew the quavering of his heart, and that in this the greatest moment of his life he had a coward's twittering. It was only when she reached his side and gave him a quick little smile that he became a man again, forgot all that was around him, forgot all that was past, and had no thought of the future.

Of all the noteworthy happenings that Christmas Day none was more remarkable than the incident in the great barn where one hundred and fifty from the farms sat down to dinner while the greater folk were being entertained in the Hall. Tomlyn was at a middle table watching grimly the activities of Barton who, with a dozen at his command, was superintending the unrestricted supply of joints of beef, dishes of pasties, flagons of ale, and baskets of spiced cakes. Presently Barton paused in his work, took a look along the middle table and walked across to Tomlyn who was drinking a horn of ale.

"A great day, Mr. Tomlyn."

Tomlyn spluttered over his ale and set down his horn.

"Aye, a great day, Mr. Barton."

"That skimmed milk for the pigs!"

"There's some don't agree with it."

"I reckon it's better to have fat hogs than skim cheese."

"Ye're trying it, I hear."

"Been in my mind years past. Sir Valentine's very set when he likes. Glad he went to Brook House when he did. Squire's a good farmer."

"Best in Kent," said Tomlyn warmly. "Not but what your milch cows——"

"Aye, we got some good cows."

Barton hesitated, dived his hand into the pocket of his long-skirted coat and drew forth a dusty bottle. "Not fitting for you and me to be drinking ale a day like this. 'Tis a bottle of the master's old sack."

"I don't know as I've tasted sack for years," said Tomlyn. He reached across the table for his horn.

An hour later, with the tables cleared away for dancing on the boarded floor of the barn, the company from the Hall began to come in to see the fun and some to take part in it. When the squire and his bride appeared there was a clapping of hands, a stamping of feet and a medley of shouted greetings, and after that a clumsy pushing forward for well-wishings and, for a space, Harry and Edith could hardly move amid the crowd, or do more than wave a hand in answer to the chorus.

"I knowed it all along, squire," said Farmer Laslett, amid the clamour.

"Trust you for that, Laslett," said Harry.

"Three cheers for Sir Valentine," shouted Peter Syme standing on the top of a corn bin, and the huzzas

rang out not three times but six, and Sir Valentine vainly tried to make a speech and all he could say was, "Thank you, friends, thank you." Cornwallis took him by the arm and they stood together.

The fiddlers struck up and the floor cleared for the dancing to begin, and Bolney who had been waiting his opportunity led forth with due stateliness the Lady Oxenden as his partner, and Mr. Cornwallis begged the honour from Edith and proved himself surprisingly light of foot. When Sir Valentine made his bow to Deborah Gann, and Harry to Mistress Barton, old Barton who was about to clout the heads of two boys who had crept in through the lower door, forgot his righteous anger and stood transfixed. "Well, I'll be smoked and fussed," he said.

* * * * * *

That afternoon the squire took home his bride, and although she already knew Brook House and its surroundings very well, it was Harry Godwyn's pride to escort her in a circle round the house, the farm buildings and the rickyard of which henceforward she was to be the mistress. She had her hand in his.

"I hope I'll make you happy, Harry," she said, half-frightened.

"I fear that I expect too much."

"Oh, no," she cried, and clung to him.

"I shall not be happy while I live for any minute that you are from my sight."

She took his strong sinewy hand in both of her small ones and pressed it against her lips.

When they came to the porch Edith noticed high up on the stone lintel an old inscription partly revealed by the thinning ivy and asked about it. Harry lifted

her so that she might decipher the lettering made faint by age. "Godwyns makyth their own fate," she read out.

"Carved centuries ago; I do not know its origin."

"It is a proud motto," she said as he replaced her by his side. "A true one, too."

"Not true for me," said Harry, smiling. "I'm a Godwyn whose fate has been decided by a girl." He put a hand upon her shoulder.

"Who'd dare to say that but yourself."

"You're fate for me; 'twas so ordered."

She looked up at him with a reflection of his own smile.

"I have a right. Am I not a Godwyn too—these four hours past?"

THE END

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